

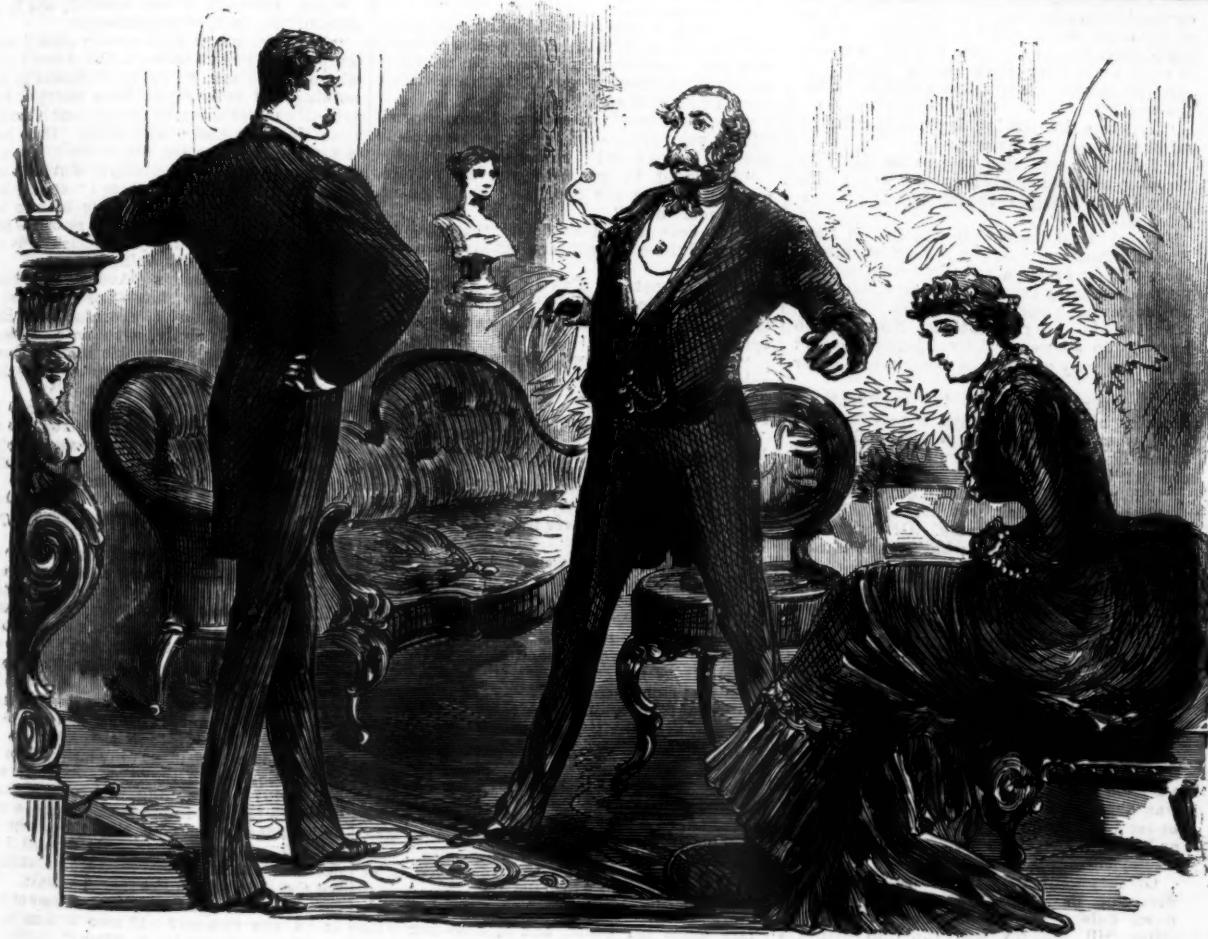
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[ALIAN GORDON'S EXPLANATION.]

ROSAMOND'S HUSBAND.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Lord Kingsford now found himself in a most awkward dilemma, and what to do he knew not. The more he turned over the subject in his brain the more puzzled he became, first swayed one way, then another. His mind was tossed about in a perfect storm of doubts. Rosamond was cleared, entirely cleared; and at what cost! She hated him in his character of Lord Kingsford, and had forbade him ever to speak to her again. How was he to approach her and declare himself? Not through the medium of Lord Kingsford, and how could she separate him in her mind from Allan Gordon? The truth must come out now at once, for matters were becoming more and more complicated. Supposing Rosamond accepted this millionaire—Rosamond, his wife? The possibility of this must be put a stop to at once—but how? Who was he to tell—who take into his confidence—Colonel Brand—Mrs. Brand—she who had been the

cause of most of Rosamond's troubles? She had poisoned her mind against him, worked upon a naturally credulous, timid, and easily led girl, had hardened her heart by robbing her of her baby in the most cruel manner, and changed the Rose of Drydd into the callous, worldly-minded Miss Rosamond Dane.

And yet Rose was not quite as hard as she seemed. Should he ever forget her overwhelming emotion the previous night—the face of despair? He had touched the one soft vulnerable corner in her heart—the memory of her child.

Poor Rosie! She had had a hard trial, a sad life, since the days he had met her first. What punishment was bad enough to inflict upon her mother, who had not scrupled to wrest her daughter's good name from her, and to break that daughter's spirit, quench all hope, and bruise her heart?

These thoughts were very busy in Allan's brain as he trotted along on his gallant grey hunter on his way to a neighbouring meet. Very few of the inmates of the inn had been sufficiently recovered from the fatigues of the night to put in an appearance; but he felt con-

fident that a rare good gallop would brighten up his faculties, and clear his brain more thoroughly than anything else.

And there was a pretty strong gathering out despite the dissipation of the previous night—several ladies. One slight figure on a chestnut thoroughbred he recognised at once, with a burly-set figure on a tall hunter by her side—Rosamond, of course, and Colonel Brand. They met in a narrow lane, where all the hours and field were going down to draw a gorse-cover a couple of fields off.

To Colonel Brand's beaming salutation he replied at once by lifting his hat, and riding up beside them. He looked at Rosamond interrogatively, Colonel Brand having made room for him to ride between them. His very boot touched the offside of her saddle as he said, in his ordinary way,

"Good morning, Miss Dane. I hope you are not very tired this morning. Awfully sporting of you to come out!"

"Would she keep her word? Would she speak to him or not? For some moments he received no reply. The fair, clear-cut profile was resolutely turned away. Then she moved her

head and suddenly gave him one look—just one—of amazed indignation, of blighting contempt; and with a sudden plunge forward, caused by a vicious dig of her spur, she joined another party just in front, and in another moment was galloping along with them down to the cover, leaving Colonel Brand and Lord Kingsford alone.

"You must not mind her," said the former, apologetically; he had a great respect for the titled young man in the scarlet coat riding beside him, with his lips tightened rather curiously beneath his dark moustache. "None of us mind Rosamond," soothingly. "She has a queer temper sometimes, and she is in one of what we call her 'dark moods' to-day. A run with the hounds will do her all the good in the world."

"Is it true that she is going to be married?" said his companion, quietly.

"I don't know. She is just as likely to throw up her head and bolt out of it as not. She has no great liking for the fellow. It's a one-sided affair."

Colonel Brand was diplomatic. If Lord Kingsford was sounding him so much the better. He would far prefer a rich nobleman with a place like Armine Court for his son-in-law than this somewhat plebeian millionaire.

"She is hard to please, then? No hurry, no hurry!" in answer to Colonel Brand's query; "they are only putting the hounds into cover now!"

"Yes, very. The fact is," confidentially dropping his voice, "she had a very bad case once, when she was quite a girl; fellow behaved like a scoundrel, and she has never got over it!"

"Oh, really!" looking down at his stirrups.

"It has, so to speak, put her against men, and all thoughts of marrying. Of course she has had scores of offers; but it has always seemed."

"So it would seem. Hello! he's in it!" alluding to the fox, and setting this horse into a sharp canter.

There he goes, with the prospect of a good man, with a good heart under him, and young blood in his veins. The coat behind him all gone for the present, and was dashing through a stiff thorn hedge before Colonel Brand had realized that the was gone.

Rosamond was well away with the hounds, too. Allan saw her blue habit speed along across the field to the left. She evidently knew where she was about, and no mistake. She came out under a tree, and was soon in the same field as himself. They took the next fence together, side by side.

On they went; now in the same line, now diverging, he leading off the hedge; up hill and down dale, over brooks, hedges, marshes, stiles, till the fox was run into within a hundred yards of a friendly cover in a plantation, just eight miles from where he had been viewed away.

The brush was handed to the only lady up. It was by rights Lord Kingsford's property, for he had been the only man with the hounds when they had run into the fox, and he had saved it; but he did not dare to present it in person to the fair Diana, who remained at some little distance aloof on her panting, blowing chestnut, with distended nostrils and extended fore legs; he had had enough of it if she had not.

Presently Colonel Brand came tearing up—a little late, and bearing traces of briars across his ruddy face.

"Good run, capital spin, Kingsford. I say, come and dine with us this evening, quite without ceremony."

The bidden guest glanced over at Miss Dane, now surrounded by a mob of Nimrods, and made up his mind on the spot to say "Yes," and accepted at once, with much politeness.

"I suppose you're not coming our way?" continued Colonel Brand, affably.

"No, it's pretty early yet; we're safe for a run from here, and I've got a fellow somewhere about with my second horse; so, good-bye for the present," trotting away.

On his way home Colonel Brand informed his step-daughter of his invitation, and who it was that was coming to take "pot-luck."

She listened in perfect silence, made no remark of any kind, but she inwardly resolved to lay the case before her mother, and to utterly and firmly decline to meet Lord Kingsford on any terms whatever.

When they had reached home she changed her muddy habit, swallowed a cup of hot tea, and then went (a most unusual proceeding) to her mother's room, and knocked at her door with her knuckles.

"Come in, come in," said a languid voice, and the open door revealed Mrs. Brand lying on a sofa, novel in hand, in a rose-coloured, satin-quilted dressing gown, what she called "resting for dinner."

"Oh, dear me!" in a tone of amazement. "Is it you, Rosamond? So you have come home. What is it?" rather peevishly.

"I wanted to speak to you in private, mother," closing the door, and walking over, "so I came here."

"Oh, dear me! I do detest these private calls, and these tragedy airs, but sit down—sit down!"

"You cannot say I've troubled you much with either, mother," said Rosamond, gravely, looking at her companion with clear, appealing eyes.

"And what is it now? You make my headache!"

"I wish to speak to you about Lord Kingsford."

"What!" springing up very eagerly, and letting the novel slide to the floor with a bang. "Has he proposed to you?"

"He happens to have a wife living," rejoined her daughter, indignantly; "and what I wish to say is this, that I never intend to meet him, or speak to him again."

"With living! Never speak to him again! Rubbish, nonsense!" ejaculated Mrs. Brand, angrily.

"It is nonsense! I will not endure his society!" rising and confronting her mother. "Last night he went beyond all bounds. He nearly drove me crazy. He knows my whole wretched story."

"What!" in a tone of horrified dismay.

"Yes, everything—even to my first meeting with Allan Gordon—my marriage, our trip to Paris."

"Great heavens! How—how did he hear this?"

"And, as a last straw, he asked me about my baby," speaking with a very white face. "He did not seem to think it was dead. He seemed to fancy that I had murdered it, or deserted it!"

A sudden, anxious expression in her mother's face made her pause, and look at her with amazement.

Could it be that he had any grounds for his idea? Oh! could it? She asked herself this question with a heart that was almost bursting with the vague, mere, half-defined hope.

"He mentioned the woman who had had a child—a 'Mother Nan,' she continued aloud, still keeping her eyes fixed upon her companion, whose hands were fidgeting uneasily with her lace frills, and whose face was actually of a dull lemon colour. "Oh! mother—mother!" she cried, throwing herself on her knees beside the sofa; "tell me if it is true; tell me if you put it out to nurse, and told me it was dead! Tell me," seizing her hand and covering it with kisses, "and I will forgive everything—anything—to know that it is alive!" she cried, passionately. "Anything—all I have in the world—if I may only see it!"

"What nonsense, Rosamond!" wrenching away her hand. "Are you mad, or beside yourself?" cried Mrs. Brand, querulously. "You are certainly crazy!" giving her a little push as she spoke. "Your child is dead! and a good thing too! You should be ashamed to speak of it!"

At this acrid rebuke Rosamond, still kneeling,

covered her face with her hands, and kept in silence for some moments. Then rising, she said, slowly,—

"I beg your pardon, mother, for thinking you would have deceived me. I was sure he was wrong. I was sure—however angry you might be—you never—never would have robbed me of all I had!" in a choked voice.

"All you had, indeed! I hate to hear you!" impatiently. "You are quite imbecile on the subject, and clinging to what another girl would shrink from with horror!"

"But, after all, I was married, and in a church," she said, with some spirit.

"We have heard that so very often," contemptuously; "but where is the church? and where is the man? Vague assertions go for nothing! I believe you were married, but probably under assumed names; and it's more than likely he had a wife living. If he had not, why should he not claim you? You are rich, young, and very pretty! But men are wicked enough for anything!" closing her eyes as she spoke, and leaning back on her pillow. "I suppose you would recognize him if you saw him, would you, though it is six years ago?" without opening her eyes.

"I should, of course. And do you know who he strongly resembles—Lord Kingsford?"

"Lord Kingsford!" scornfully. "How likely a mere nobody, with no good blood in his veins, would resemble him, who bears the stamp of what I think is even more than goodness—in every feature!"

"Lord Kingsford is a hateful man! He knows my secret, and does not scruple to use it as an instrument of the most agonizing torture! How he learnt all he does know I cannot tell. Megamont have been bribed!"

"Megamont is beyond a tribe. If the talk of you to other people, what will become of you, Rosamond?"

"I don't know, and don't much care," she answered, recklessly, now pacing the room, as she spoke, to and fro with hasty footsteps. "Life is too hard for me; everywhere I turn I meet with some rude blow. One thing however, is positively certain, that nothing will induce me to speak to Lord Kingsford again. I'm not quite fallen as low as he imagines; and you may tell him from me if you like that I detest and despise him, and that as far as I'm concerned he may blazon my history from one end of England to the other. After all, what did I do?" declaiming with uplifted hand.

"I was a foolish, impressionable girl—a man child, indeed. I married, as I believed, the man I loved, as many other girls do, and I was deceived, as many other girls are. But ours is not the sin; we are the sinned against. Why should public opinion point the finger of scorn at us, the victims? If ever a man in the world deserved true it was Allan."

"Ah!" said her mother, with a sneer, "you had had such wide experience. Seventeen knows so much of the world, and men—"

"I see it is no use talking to you, mother; you can never understand," gazing at her with reproachful eyes. "If Allan had been drowned at sea I could have borne it better, but he landed in Australia."

"Or pretended he did," put in Mrs. Brand sharply.

"Yes! if he were dead it would not seem so bad, though perhaps I should not say so; but to know that he is alive, is somewhere, and has wholly forgotten me is the sharpest pain of all. But I see, mother, that I only waste you. Forgive me; you must remember that you are the only person in the world to whom I can open my heart on this subject, and it is the blessed relief of speech, and you will do me the justice to admit that it is not often I break the silence."

"No, thank goodness!" said her companion fervently.

"I'm not coming down to dinner to-night," proceeded her daughter, calmly. "I shall have tea in the morning room. I do not oblige to meet Lord Kingsford, and you need not make any excuses for me. He will understand the

I mean to keep my word—that I will have none of his company, none of his hateful advances, and that, as far as I am concerned, he may go, tell my story, far and wide, and do his worst." So saying Miss Dane walked over to the door, opened it, nodded impressively to her mother, who lay helplessly staring at such an unusual exhibition on the part of her frail daughter, and went out.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Lord Kingsford arrived in unimpeachable evening dress, and was received by Mrs. Brand, Colonel Brand, and Miss Glen only. They had a most excellent and appetizing little dinner, and no mention whatever was made of the abantes.

Her guest talked a great deal of the afternoon's run to Colonel Brand, and who were in it, and who were not. He discussed the ball with Amy, but did not talk much to his hostess.

Amy sat exactly opposite to him, and declared that really, on second thoughts, he was better looking than Alex Forbes. His features were more regular, and he had splendid teeth, not that he showed them frequently, or indulged in many smiles.

"What a lovely solitaire stud that was in his shirt front! What brought him after them to Leicester?" she asked herself, with beaming heart, as she dispensed of a plentiful of walnuts he had cracked for her benefit.

He looked so friendly, too, as if he had something to tell her. Could it be that she was the attraction that had drawn him so far? Why not? said triumphant conceit, more unlikely things have happened; and she beamed her best, her most warranted and witching smiles across the dessert.

Never had he been so agreeable, never had he exerted himself so much. His conversational powers were quite brilliant, and Amy felt most reluctant when her hostess gave the fatal signal for departure.

She quite longed for the drawing-room door to open, and the two gentlemen to join them; but they would be sure to sit talking for ever so long over that hateful, stupid hunting, and she sipped her tea disconsolately, whilst Mrs. Brand indulged in forty-winks, and not a few more.

At length they did come. The door was flung open at last. This time it was neither cake nor coffee.

Amy, in answer to Lord Kingsford's petition, sang two sparkling little songs, whilst he leant his elbow on the piano and watched her.

Yes, she had made an impression at last, and she was the more confirmed in this rapturous view by his leaning over and saying to her, in every low voice, accompanied by a thrilling glance,—

"Miss Glen, will you do me a favour?"

"Certainly, of course; with pleasure!" she answered.

"You won't think me awfully rude or impudent if I ask you to leave me alone with Colonel and Mrs. Brand for half-an-hour, will you?"

"Oh! of course!" becoming very red.

He was going to ask for her hand. She saw it all, rising from the piano.

"Just slip out quietly, not as if you were going on purpose, and you can't think how much obliged I shall be to you! You need not go yet, you know, it's so soon; she isn't half awake. Come over and show me those Italian photographs," walking towards the table.

The photographs duly discussed, Amy seized a moment, when she was not taking part in the conversation, and stole away, full of high hopes.

She had barely closed the door when Allan, resolved to make the very most of his time, said,—

"I wish particularly to speak to you, Colonel Brand and Mrs. Brand, alone, on a subject concerning Miss Dane and myself."

"He is going to propose," thought both

these good people, essentially, and beamed and smirked to their very utmost, to show him that they were prepared to lend him a most favourable ear.

Mrs. Brand stroked down her satin lap, and Colonel Brand stuck his thumb in the arm-hole of his waistcoat, and looked benignant.

Lord Kingsford remained standing, with his back to the fire, but wear them bath.

"I daresay you wonder what I can possibly have to say to you in private," he continued, looking from one to the other, "and with regard to Miss Dane."

"Oh, dear! I think we can guess," returned Mrs. Brand, smiling at him with extraordinary significance. "There is usually but one topic that a young man wishes to lay before a young lady's father and mother alone."

"I think I ought to tell you that I am going to make you acquainted with some facts that will surprise you very much," said Lord Kingsford. "You probably never knew that Miss Dane and I were connected!"

"You and Rosamond!" cried Mrs. Brand, in a tone of great surprise. "And how? You are not related to me, nor are you—that I know, at least—related to the Danes," looking at him very sharply.

"Still you will see that I am no stranger to the family, Mrs. Brand, and you will be prepared to hear that—speaking very deliberately—"I know all Miss Dane's past. There is nothing that I do not know."

At this Mrs. Brand looked very red and uncomfortable, and fidgeted about in her chair, dropped her hand-screen, picked it up, and said nothing.

"I allude to her life after she left school, her meeting with Allan Gordon, her—"

"Don't!" fiercely. "Don't speak of it. Don't name the scoundrel," cried Colonel Brand, jumping to his feet with immense animation. "I only wish I had him here now, I would not leave him a whole bone in his body," squaring himself with a very bellicose expression.

"No!" remarked Lord Kingsford, with wonderful sang-froid and slightly lifted eyebrows. "I think it will be best to tell you, before you say anything further which we might both regret, that *I am Allan Gordon!*"

If a bombshell had exploded on the hearth-rug it would not have caused more dismay than this extraordinary announcement. Colonel Brand recoiled and gasped like a fish who has just been landed from his natural element; his mouth was open, his eyes literally looked as if they were about to fall out of his head, so round and prominent had they become; and as to Mrs. Brand, her attitude was simply that of perfect incredulity.

"What? what did you say?" said Colonel Brand at last. "I must have misunderstood you."

"I said that I was Allan Gordon. I am Rosamond's husband, and she is, and has been for the last year, not Mrs. Gordon, much less Miss Dane, but Lady Kingsford."

"What does it all mean?" demanded Colonel Brand, excitedly. "Are you drunk or dreaming, or are you out of your mind?"

"It requires some explanation, certainly, and you shall have it now at once," looking from one to the other impressively. "I was an engineer, as you have heard, sent down to survey Drydd Marishes for the new line of rail. I then accidentally met Miss Dane, fell in love with her, proposed for her, and married her. She was doubtful of her own strength of mind during my enforced absence in Australia. She found that you would not hear of our engagement. She was totally ignorant of the fact that she was her grandmother's heiress, and so was I, and at her suggestion we were married before I sailed, to make assurance doubly sure. We were married at St. Andrew's, Paddington, on a dark foggy morning, and went straight to Paris for our honeymoon. To make everything clear to you, Colonel and Mrs. Brand, here is the original copy of our marriage certificate," holding out as he spoke a much-folded and weather-stained looking piece of paper.

Mrs. Brand received it in a dazed, dreamy

kind of way, and scarily looked at the names Allan Gordon, bachelor, and Rosamond Dane, spinster. Her mind was still reeling from the shock she had but just received. She had made away with and consigned to the gutter the eldest, only son of this young nobleman—the heir to Armine Court. But who was Tommy?

"You see," proceeded Allan, in a cool, decisive tone, "we were as legally married as you were yourself, Mrs. Brand. I went to Melbourne on important business. I was obliged to go for the sake of money. I was poor, and necessity knows no law. I meant to make a home for Rosamond, and send for her, or fetch her, ere the year was over. I went direct from one ship to another, never stopping; went on board a clipper for New Zealand the very day we got into Melbourne. I did not wish to waste an hour."

"Yes, yes," assented Colonel Brand, "and what next?"

"We met with bad weather; we were cast away and completely wrecked on a barren island far away out of the track of ships, and there, half starving, living on sea-weed, gannets' eggs, we dragged out, those that survived, a miserable existence for nearly three years. We were at last taken off by an American whaler, and I returned, as it were, from the sea, and from the dead, to England, after an absence of nearly four years. I discovered that fortune, to make up to me for all my ill-luck, had bestowed on me a new name, plenty of money, and plenty of friends, who never heard, and never cared about the poor struggling engineer—Allan Gordon. My first business was to find my wife—no easy matter.

"I traced her to your London house—you had left; to Drydd—she was not there either; but I discovered," looking keenly at Mrs. Brand, "some one else. A little ragged urchin took my fancy, and I his."

"I brought him to the inn to give him a meal, and quite accidentally heard his story, whispered, of course. He was Miss Dane's boy, born at Drydd, abandoned by his mother, who had left him with a drunken old harsidion at the cost of a few shillings a week, and had latterly entirely forgotten his existence."

"I need scarcely say with what feelings I listened to this. I adopted Tommy on the spot, and I looked upon his mother as the most unnatural and weak-minded of women. I was resolved to bury Allan Gordon in Lord Kingsford, at least for a time, for my former acquaintances in most cases failed to recognise me."

"Four years of the life I led is as much as twenty of a life at home for changing a man's looks. I was aged and sunburnt, and no longer wore a beard. The first time we met, quite accidentally, she did not know me. Of course I knew her, though the fashionable distinguished-looking, worldly Miss Dane was as different from Rosamond Gordon as dark from light."

"I kept aloof from her as much as possible. Her treatment of Tommy, her repudiation of her marriage, her apparent total forgetfulness of me, hardened my heart; and yet she had ever, in spite of myself, an extraordinary fascination for me."

"I knew I should have to acknowledge her some day, for Tommy's sake, and I deferred that day for many reasons. The great talk and nine days' wonder it would give rise to was one; and the dread of placing myself in her power, knowing her disposition, her absolute lack of heart, was another. I have since discovered—only last night—that I wronged her," looking intently and significantly at Mrs. Brand, "that she was not an unnatural mother; that the loss of her child, whom she supposed to be dead, had frozen her heart; that her mind, easily worked upon, was moulded to their own purposes by other people."

"Oh, Lord Kingsford!" cried Mrs. Brand, hastily jumping to her feet, her face working with agitation, her hands clasped in an agony of supplication, "I did it all for the best!—I did, on my honour and word, and for the

sake of her good name. She had no proofs; you were invisible. It seemed such an unusual, such a miserable story, what could I do?"

" You might have left her her baby!" he said, sternly. " Only by the mere accident of my going to Drydd I doubt if he would be alive now—half-starved, beaten, and bruised, as he was when I found him. You might have given me the benefit of the doubt; you might have said that I was dead, and let her at least consider herself a widow. You might have had the registers of the London churches searched—that was easy enough. You might have done all these things; but the fact was you did not wish to recognise the fact of Rosamond's probable marriage with a pauper like me, as I was then."

Mrs. Brand made no reply. She had collapsed once more into her arm-chair, and was forcing some crocodile tears—tears which were very destructive to the pearl powder on her face, for Mrs. Brand, having been a beauty, still fondly clung to the delusion that she had a complexion, and just tinged her sallow cheeks and powdered them to give them the corresponding luster.

" Begad," cried Colonel Brand, staring hard at his newly-discovered son-in-law, " this beats everything I've ever heard in all my life—everything!" stuffing his hands violently into his pockets. " Rosamond's runaway lover a lord! Rosamond's baby, that I thought was dead, Tommy! She does not know it yet, I suppose?"

" No, and I don't know how I am to tell her, or who is to tell her," said the other, gravely.

" Fancy Rosamond being Lady Kingsford!" exclaimed Colonel Brand, in a tone of repressed triumph. " What a sell for all the girls who have been setting their caps at you, eh, Kingsford?"

" I don't know how the county will take it," smiling. " They had better be told the truth, I suppose; that's always the best plan. But it is rather premature talking of the public, when the principal party concerned is, so far, in ignorance of the whole matter."

" And she has taken the greatest dislike to you!" said Mrs. Brand, with a little sniff of vicious triumph, drying her eyes as she spoke. " You are perfectly right, my dear madam. She abhors Lord Kingsford; but the question remains to be seen. Will she abhor Allan Gordon?"

" She will never believe that you and he are the same."

" She would if I had a chance of speaking to her, but she declared she never would open her lips to me again; and this morning, as you saw," looking at Colonel Brand, " she administered the most pointed and unmistakable cut direct, and she declines to meet me this evening."

" Why is she so bitter against you? What have you been saying to her to put her back up—ah?" inquired Colonel Brand, inquisitively.

" I showed her that I knew all her life, and she imagines me to be some relation of Allan Gordon's. She sees, very naturally, a strong likeness between us. She knows that I am a married man, that my wife is living; for I told her so at Violet Hill one day last autumn; and every advance I make to her she believes I am actuated by the basest and most dishonourable motives, and matters are now at a dead lock. Until yesterday I was angry with Rosamond. I resented her treatment of Tommy. I was not inclined to make it up with her, at least not often, and now that she is entirely cleared, she, by a horrible perversity of circumstances, will have nothing to do with me."

" There is nothing for it but to leave it to time," said Colonel Brand. " Time and chance, and it will all come right."

" Oh!" impatiently, " it's all very fine for you to talk of time and chance in this matter-of-fact way, Colonel Brand, but you forgot that Rosamond and I have been separated for six years. That's a tolerably good slice out of

one's youth. I'm not inclined to put myself in the hands of time, though I suppose I must wait," discontentedly. " I can't very well force myself into her society and say, 'Here I am; I'm your husband! I'm Allan Gordon!'"

" She would not believe you, you think?"

" With her present feelings towards me—bitter resentment and deep animosity—I'm sure she would not. I tell you and Mrs. Brand, and Miss Glen had better be told, but just at present I think the secret had better go no further."

" As you please," acquiesced Colonel Brand, frankly. " What do you say, Mrs. B?"

" Yes, I think as Rosamond herself does not know, we had better all keep our own counsel, at least for the present."

Thus the master concluded, and a few minutes later Lord Kingsford's dogcart was announced; and promising to drop in whenever he felt inclined, and shaking hands with his host and hostess, he wrapped himself up in a thick, frieze ulster, lit his cigar, and drove himself rapidly back to the Queen's Head.

" I've given them something to think of," he said to himself, " something out of the common. By Jove! their faces were a caution! I thought the old lady was going to have a paralytic stroke, and he an apoplectic seizure. At any rate, I've put a pretty big spoke in that fellow Somer's wheel!"

Meanwhile his late listeners were sitting at either side of the fire, blankly staring at one another. This was the calm before the storm, and when it burst out, a perfect tempest of mutual recrimination set in.

" How could you leave the child to starve, Mrs. B.? You heard it was dead? I don't believe you!" said her husband, pouting.

" Well, I'm no worse, no, not so bad, as you!" she rejoined, furiously. " It was you that declared that the young man was a scoundrel, and would never listen to the idea of her being married. You ought to have had the registers looked over, as he said."

" All very fine to say ought to, now. A nice kettle of fish you have made of it, Mrs. B."

" I! Oh, of course!" scornfully. " Put it all down to me, that's so like you."

At this crisis the door opened, and Amy came gliding in, looking very expectant and very anxious, and glancing around with a rather disappointed air.

" Well, where is he?" she asked at last. " Has he gone? Surely not already; it's only half-past ten!"

" Yes, my dear, he is gone," said Colonel Brand, standing now with his coat tails under his arms and his back to the fire. " We have had a most extraordinary piece of intelligence from him," eyeing her as he spoke. " I'll give you ten guesses and you'll never find out, clever little girl as you are!"

" I think I know," said Amy, in a low voice, a smile she could not repress struggling about the corners of her mouth as she stood in the middle of the room, twisting her bangles, her eyes cast bashfully on the floor.

" Bless us, and save us!" exclaimed Colonel Brand. " How the mischief could you know? You're not wiser than your elders? You don't mean to say you think," speaking with slow and unwanted emphasis, " that he has been coming here after you? Ha, ha, ha! Well, you may put that idea out of your head, little Miss Amy," chuckling to himself.

" Then," with a gasp, " it's—it's Rosamond! It's Rosamond he has been thinking of all the time, and he always seemed to hate her; any way, she abhors him!" with tearful triumph flashing out of her wet indignant eyes. " Does he want to marry Rosamond?" she reiterated, angrily.

" No, my dear, he does not," pomposly, " that little ceremony took place some time ago—say six years. In fact, not to keep you any longer than need be on tenter hooks, he came here this evening expressly to introduce himself to us—as Allan Gordon—Lord Kingsford—and Rosamond's husband!"

(To be continued.)

THE MYSTERY OF ALANDYKE.

CHAPTER XVII.

Poor Dr. Gates really believed he had to do with delirium. He led the weary father into the dining-room, and rang for refreshments. He positively refused to listen to another word or to answer another question until Sir Jocelyn had eaten and drank.

" You have over fatigued yourself," he said, consolingly. " That and the shock of the little girl's illness has been too much for you."

Sir Jocelyn caught his hand.

" Gates, you are an honest man. I can trust you. Bear with me while I tell you my awful secret, and then you will see my words are no mere delusion."

The doctor drew two chairs forward. He began to fear there was some ground for the baronet's remorse. Any way, the confidence was safe with him. It might be a relief to the lonely man to pour out his trouble.

" You remember how I succeeded to Alandyke, Gates? You were not here then; but you must have heard the story."

" I know that you were the cousin of the late baronet—that for some disagreement he cast off his only son and adopted you, his estates being unentailed."

" Aye, and you have heard the story, how, while the coming of age of the false heir was being celebrated, the true heir was found in snow, and brought home to his father's house to die."

" I know the rumour went that man was Sir Kenneth's son, but it was never acknowledged as a fact by the family."

" It was a fact. I did not know it at the time."

" Even so you have no cause for remorse. You must have been a mere boy when Sir Kenneth adopted you."

" Yes. I take no blame to myself for that. My sin was later on. Five years afterwards, while I was in France, Sir Kenneth died. By his will Alandyke and its revenues descend to me and my heirs for ever."

" I know. Harold Leigh at your own showing was dead. In all spirit of right you were his father's heir."

" From the time of Sir Kenneth's death," went on Jocelyn, " a shadow crept up between my wife and me. She had been with the old man in his last illness, had received his dying words, but she never spoke of them. If some one alluded to our kinsman she changed the subject. Then troubles came. My wife sank into a nervous invalid after our boy's death. She seemed as one possessed by an exciting dread. When she was dying she confided her secret. Sir Kenneth's son had left a wife and little children. The old man had allowed them a yearly income. Time had softened his heart towards them, and made a will which, while it secured me a handsome income, left Alandyke and its revenues to his eldest grandchild. This will, and papers containing Mrs. Harold Leigh's address—the name by which she was known—and other details he entrusted to my wife."

" Don't finish," said the Doctor, feelingly. " I understand Lady Alberta was wrapped up in her son; she would not let him be ousted out of his inheritance."

Sir Jocelyn bowed his head.

" I think the knowledge of what she had done killed her—the thought of those other children exiled from home and left in poverty tortured her. When she was dying she implored me to make restitution."

" I can't believe you refused."

" Refused! It was my wish as much as hers, but the precious packet containing Sir Kenneth's will and those other documents was not to be found!"

" Not to be found!"

" No." Sir Jocelyn shuddered. " Remember, my wife made her confession to me on her death-bed; before she had finished it death claimed her. Whether she would have added

that she destroyed the papers, or whether she could have told me the place of their hiding-place, no tongue can tell."

"But you have searched?"

"Searched! I knew that if they were in existence the papers would be in her boudoir. I had the room looked up, and night and day no creature has entered except myself. I have searched and searched until my reason has almost given way, and found no clue."

"But—"

"I know what you would say. Why didn't I advertise—why didn't I seek the true heirs of Alandyke? I could not do either without exposing my dead wife's sin. If the papers were recovered I should know the name which Harold Leigh's widow bears. I could go to her and restore all, or I could go to a solicitor and frankly tell him I had found the will after all these years. Without the papers my hands seemed tied. I could not proclaim my wife's dishonour, and so I have spent five years of misery, searching, hoping to discover the clue, or that some strange chance would send one of Harold Leigh's children across my path."

"And no one knows this but you?"

"My wife's foster-mother knows something. I often think if she chose she could help me, but she refuses; the woman and I are deadly foes."

Dr. Gates drew a long breath.

"It reads like a chapter of romance."

"It has blighted my life. The income Sir Kenneth actually left me would be ample for my wants; as a fact, I have never spent as much in any year. If I could find the true heirs and make restitution, I should feel a free man. I could look the whole world in the face, and be proud of my children, as other fathers are. Now I am haunted by a long dread my punishment will fall on them."

"I do not think you can take any steps in the matter," said the Doctor, thoughtfully. "If you move in it you expose your poor wife's wrong doing."

"That has kept me silent."

"Besides, has it never occurred to you that your cousin's grandchildren may be dead? Their mother, missing her usual income, would surely write to demand the cause of its stopping. If she had been living in the ten years which have elapsed since Sir Kenneth's death some appeal must have reached you."

Sir Jocelyn shook his head.

"That view of the case is the only one that gives me a moment's ease, and yet even that supposition has its dark side. If the children of Harold Leigh are dead, the mystery will never be unravelled. To my life's end I shall never have any certainty of their fate. Gates, you don't know the good this talk has been to me. I feel as if a weight had rolled from my heart, the keeping of this secret has almost killed me."

The elder man understood what the burden had been to that proud, honourable spirit. He put his hand on Sir Jocelyn's shoulder almost as if he had been a younger brother of his own.

"You have your children to comfort you. You would like to look at them, and then you had better go to bed. A good night's rest will do you all the good in the world. I am going to stay here till morning."

"Is my sister here?"

"Lady Daryl cannot leave London," thinking it needless to give the lady's very heartless words.

"She is their mother's own sister," said Sir Jocelyn, angrily, "and yet she has no love in her heart for my poor children!"

"They don't lack love," said the Doctor, cheerfully. "Their nurse is devoted to them. I had a great difficulty in making her go to bed just now; but she had been up two nights, and—"

He broke off abruptly. He remembered Sir Jocelyn knew nothing of Miss Stuart's arrival.

"There are plenty of servants to relieve her," said the Baronet, simply.

"I would never have urged her to leave

Adela to a servant. A young lady is with her. I believe we have disobeyed your orders, Sir Jocelyn, but I must take all the blame. A sick child's whims are not to be crossed, and Adela's one cry was for this young lady."

They had reached the nursery now. As he spoke the doctor walked rapidly on, and now they stood before the bed. The two were much as Dr. Gates had left them, only that sleep had come to them both. Nell's eyes were closed, and she, too, had forgotten all her sorrows; but even in her sleep her face had none of the joyousness of the little girl's. Even in all its peace and innocence it bore the shadow of a great sorrow.

Sir Jocelyn looked at the picture with a strange light in his eyes.

"Thank Heaven!" he murmured, gently, "Thank Heaven!"

Dr. Gates never doubted that the thanksgiving was for his child's being spared to him.

He little knew that the second head on the pillow was dearer to the baronet than Adela's—that for five weary months Sir Jocelyn had mourned and sorrowed for Nell, as men do only for the one love of their life.

The doctor knew nothing of all this. He put it down entirely to his parental affection, when the baronet's hand grew heavy on his arm, and he staggered, so that the physician had to half lift, half drag him into the adjoining room, where the strong man's strength gave way, and he sank unconscious into a chair.

CHAPTER XVIII., AND LAST.

It was morning. The sunlight was back again. Adela Leigh lay on her pillow, white and wan still, but with some animation in her feeble voice, and more strength in her delicate frame.

The doctor looked at her cheerfully, and told the nurse she would do well. Mab, bright and joyous, presided at her father's breakfast, gay as a bird, and full of delightful fancies as to what they would do when "Adela got quite well."

Sir Jocelyn listened with a deep thankfulness in his dark eyes, and upstairs nurse bent over a slight, fragile creature who was lying on the sofa in nurse's own room.

They had carried Nell there in the early morning when Adela awoke. They had promised the child her friend would return, then Dr. Gates had administered a composing draught to his new patient, and advised no one to disturb her. But it was twelve o'clock now. Nurse had brought a tray of dainty breakfast to her favourite, but Nell seemed almost too weak to eat it.

"I must go now," she said, feebly, trying to sit up, and her head falling back from sheer weakness. "I only came because Adela was ill."

"Miss Adela's ill now, my dear young lady; and, indeed, you're not fit to leave the house. Stay with us till the little girl is stronger," said Nurse, who was strongly impressed with the mystery which overhung all Nell's movements. "Indeed, you're not fit to go to London!"

"But, Sir Jocelyn!" said Nell, feebly; "he may be here any time now!"

Nurse was much too wise to admit he was here now. She told Miss Stuart the deserted schoolroom was quite at her disposal; there she would be free from all intruders, and should receive frequent reports of the sufferer. Nell liked the idea. With trembling steps she followed nurse down stairs to the pretty room where she had spent so many happy hours.

Just the same! Not a thing altered. As she sank wearily into a chair, it seemed to Nell almost as if she had never been away. Nurse returned to the nursery to find Sir Jocelyn confronting her with a grave face.

"Where is Miss Stuart?"

Nurse began a vehement defence of her own conduct, but her master checked her.

"I wish to tell you," his voice lowered that it should not disturb the sick child in the next

room, "that I have long since discovered my doubts of Miss Stuart were groundless. Could I have found her before I went abroad I should have left my children in her charge. You need make no excuses for her return, nothing could have pleased me more!"

"I am glad, sir!" said Nurse, heartily. "We've had many governesses coming here, but there never was one like her!"

Sir Jocelyn quite agreed with her. He strode away in the direction of the school-room. He opened the door noiselessly, then his heart ached as, at sight of the little figure in the great easy chair, he noticed the changes those months had made in her.

"You have been very ill!"

She started.

Sir Jocelyn took her hand, checking the trembling words on her lips.

"I have come to ask your pardon!" he said, very gravely. "I knew within twenty-four hours of your leaving here how cruelly I had misjudged you. Can you ever forgive me?"

Nell whispered "Yes," but she kept her eyes bent steadily on the ground.

"Where have you been?" asked the Baronet, suddenly. "I have tried in vain to trace you! Your mother and sister had no knowledge of you."

She answered his question by another.

"Oh, have you seen them?"

"Yes! Your mother. Did you know she had married again?"

"Yes," faintly.

"Well, she has gone to Italy; her present husband has relations there. He was doing very badly in England. He thought he could make a fortune there, and your mother was delighted at the prospects."

He never told Nell that he and Lord Carruthers had point-blank demanded of Charles D'Arcy what sum paid yearly would ensure his residence abroad, and his treating his wife civilly. The Italian had replied, with a leer, he expected about three hundred pounds; and the gentlemen had there and then agreed to pay him five-and-twenty pounds on the first of every month so long as he kept out of England. The first time he was seen on British ground, or that news of his ill-treating his wife reached them, the money would stop. Mr. D'Arcy thought he had discovered a gold mine, and was profuse in his thanks and promises. All his attempts to trace the Yorkshire family of his wife's first husband had failed, and he was literally at his last gasp, when one week, after the proposal in Mrs. Yorke's drawing-room, Lord Carruthers and Sir Jocelyn appeared before him with their extraordinary offer.

No; this was not the time to tell Nell these details, they could be disclosed to her in time. Looking at her sweet, sad face, Sir Jocelyn determined to keep all unpleasant subjects from her.

"Italy!" repeated the girl, in amazement; "but where is Bee? Did they take her too?"

"Bee is in Paris, spending her honeymoon! Brides seem fond of Paris. I remember Isabel Yorke went there too!"

Nell looked bewildered.

"Married—little Bee?"

"Yes," said Sir Jocelyn Leigh, quietly. "I was at her wedding a fortnight ago. I wished to give her away, but she refused, on account of what she called my abominable treatment of her sister."

Nell blushed.

"She ought not to have said that."

"It was true enough. Bee is a pretty child. She and Isabel are great friends. Don't you want to know your brother-in-law's name?"

"I can't believe in his existence yet. How much seems to have happened since I left here! Bee was a music teacher in Camberwell the last time I heard of her."

"She gave that up and took to singing. Isabel sought her out, first in the hope of hearing news of you, then for her own sake. She spent all her leisure time with the Yorkes, and there she met her husband."

"I hope he will be good to her," dreamily.

"I am sure he will. When I heard of the engagement I declared it was preposterous, but since I have seen them together I have quite changed my mind. Your little sister likes to be petted and taken care of. She would never have been happy with a young man."

"Whom has she married?"

"An old friend of yours. Don't be surprised. Your pretty sister is Countess of Carruthers."

A long, long silence; then Nell said, faintly—

"Don't think me selfish, only I shall miss her so. Bee always seemed to belong to me. I used to want to be rich just to take care of her, and now I have lost her; I am all alone! Oh, if Goody had only let me die in the fever! It may be very wicked, but I wish I had."

"Goody—you have seen her?"

"I have been there ever since I left here."

"Impossible!"

"I think I was very frightened and nervous that night I lost my footing and fell into the water."

"And she pulled you out."

"Yes, and took me home. She nursed me night and day for weeks; then, just as I was getting better, I had a relapse, and she had to begin all over again. I think she believed I would really die then, the fever lasted so long. It is only a few weeks since I was allowed to get up first."

"And you came here?"

She hung her head.

"I know it was very wrong, but they told me Adela was dying, and I could not stay away."

She looked appealingly at Sir Jocelyn. She saw nothing terrible in his gaze. He was standing watching her intently, but he never spoke.

"I wanted to go away this morning," she went on, "but nurse would not let me."

"Where were you going?"

"Back to the cottage."

"But afterwards? You don't mean to spend all your life with Goody? She's a bitter foe of mine, but she seems to have been kind to you."

"Very kind. No, I meant to be a governess again."

"You look fit for it!" sarcastically.

Nell touched her hair regretfully, never doubting that was her disqualification in his eyes.

"I know it makes me look childlike, but it will soon grow; and then I thought I would write to Isabel. She was always good to me; I thought she would help me."

"You had forgiven her then?"

"I had nothing to forgive."

"Only that she robbed you of your lover. But for her fortune Guy Vernon would have been faithful."

A bright colour burst on Nell's thin cheeks.

"It was all for the best," she said, slowly. "I thought I loved him, but I know quite well now the ideal I believed in never really existed. Better my dream should break, however roughly, than that I should have married him and broken my heart."

"Then you wouldn't marry him now?"

"I would never have married him after—" her voice broke, "after last December; however much I had loved him my love died then."

Sir Jocelyn stood and watched her, his heart aching for her loneliness—a great longing on him to take her in his arms, and tell her all she was to him.

"I wonder if you have any idea how I have missed you?" he said, at last.

"You! I never thought you would remember me."

The strong man's voice broke.

"Remember you! I've tried pretty hard to forget, and never succeeded for a moment. Nell, were you very unhappy here?"

"No."

"Would you come back?"

"Do you really mean it? Come back to ba-

with Adela and Mab, instead of going among strangers?"

"Come back, but not as their governess," said Sir Jocelyn, with suppressed earnestness. "If you come back to Alandyke it must be as their mother—my much-loved wife."

Two deep red spots burst in her cheeks.

"I know," said the Baronet, tenderly. "I am unworthy such a treasure, that my troubled, world-tossed heart is no fit offering for such as you, only I love you, Nell! I love you as I never did the wife of my youth. Darling, I have known this for months. Don't you think you could trust yourself to me?"

His arms were round her then, her bright head rested on his shoulder. Nell was too happy for words. Sir Jocelyn took heart and went on—

"You shall be my darling—my treasure! But Nell, you must know the truth; I am not really the master of Alandyke. I only hold it in trust for the real heir. Any day my home might be wrested from me."

"I shouldn't mind."

"Shouldn't you?" stroking her cheek. "Think well of the drawbacks, little girl. A grave, middle-aged man encumbered with two children, nominally a wealthy baronet and landholder. Really—"

Nell's head drooped on his breast.

"Could you think that would make any difference," she asked, reproachfully.

"Not if you loved me, but—"

Her voice was faint and low, but still the words reached his ear.

"I do love you. I have loved you ever since the day Lord Carruthers first came here, and you told me your life was one long pain."

For all answer he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Nell," said Sir Jocelyn, about half-an-hour later, "there is only one question to settle when will you come to me?"

"But—"

"But buts. Listen, little girl, your sister is on her honeymoon; she will only return in time to keep Christmas at Carruthers. Your mother is in Italy. Clearly you have no near relations to whom I can trust you. We have known each other long enough to be sure of our own minds. I want you here. Let me go to London for a special licence, and we can be married here at Alandyke. I am quite sure Isabel and her husband will come and grace the ceremony. If you have any friends you want to ask we will write to them."

Nell gasped.

"What would Lady Daryl say?"

"I shall not ask her. Listen, Nell; if you don't come to me we shall be completely parted. I can't come to the cottage, kind as she has been to you. I can't forgive that woman."

He talked much more in the same strain, and so Nell yielded. She would have yielded to anything he had proposed, for her heart was all his own.

They parted. It was arranged, in two days' time, when Adela was better, Sir Jocelyn should go to London for the special licence. Isabel and her husband must be entreated to come at once to the Castle, and there in the beautiful drawing-room the baronet would be united to his second bride. For a few days the happy pair would go to a quiet Yorkshire watering-place; then they would return, to make their home at Alandyke.

Goody met Helene at the entrance to the cottage—a look at the girl's face told her all.

"You are going to fill my lady's place—you will be the children's mother."

"I will love them dearly," pleaded Nell.

"Don't you think she would be pleased?"

That night the old woman went to Alandyke, and stood face to face with Sir Jocelyn Leigh.

"What do you want?" he asked, sternly.

"Have you forgotten my commands?"

"No, I have heard of your second deyie, and I come to bring you a wedding present—Sir Kenneth's will—the papers necessary for the identification of his eldest grandchild, and sole heiress."

For one moment a pang came to the baronet

that Nell could never be mistress of Alandyke; then all his better feelings triumphed.

"I thank you from my heart," he said, warmly, "even though I know you have only relented because you could not bear to see another in your nursing's place."

Goody shook her head.

"I shall see another! Sir Kenneth's granddaughter will be Lady Leigh, unless you have no truth or honour."

Sir Jocelyn smiled sadly.

"I don't think I am quite as bad as you believe; but I fail to see how Sir Kenneth's grandchild can be Lady Leigh."

Goody smiled almost benevolently.

"Because you have asked her to marry you; and if you hadn't asked her, Sir Jocelyn, I don't expect you'd ever have seen that pocket-book."

It was just as Goody had declared. The lovely nursery governess was mistress of Alandyke, and Harold Leigh's eldest child. Sir Jocelyn told her the story, and Nell nestled a little closer in his arms as he whispered,

"You won't give me up, will you?"

His pride was strong, but his love was stronger. The wedding took place just as it had been planned.

Mr. and Mrs. Yorke knew perfectly well that the shy, girlish bride brought to her husband the richest heritage in Yorkshire.

Lord and Lady Carruthers also had heard the news; but at Nell's eager prayer it was never told to the world at large.

"I had rather owe everything to you," she whispered to her husband.

And so they were wed, and in the brief space of their honeymoon changes came to Alandyke. The Lady Alberta's boudoir was dismantled and redecorated, and it became one of the favourite guest chambers.

Lady Daryl washed her hands of Sir Jocelyn and his affairs. No one much regretted it.

Goody went to her rest not many months after Nell's wedding. She had cried deeply, but her motive was to save her nursing's name from slander. She had shown, by her devotion to Nell, she was of a tender heart, and many tears were shed by young Lady Leigh over her grave.

Although the true story of the ownership of Alandyke never got abroad, the people round about ceased to speak of Adela as the heiress of the estate. They left off that title, as a matter of course, when, with the first snows of the year following her dangerous illness, she and Mab were delighted by the arrival of a baby brother.

Guy Vernon died at Monaco from a wound received in a gambling quarrel. Of the two women he had professed to love Nell felt the greater pity for his death—life had been so sunshiny for Isabel Yorke she could hardly feel much sympathy for others, but the youthful Lady Leigh could never forget the trials of her early days even in the perfect happiness which came to her through her husband's love.

She and the Countess of Carruthers are among the most joyous of English matrons, only it seems to me in Nell's manner there is the greater charm. She and her brother-in-law are great friends. She has never forgotten his kindness to her that dreary March day.

Andrew the valet is still in Sir Jocelyn's service. He is little altered since he tried so earnestly to prevent Nell from discovering the truth about THE MYSTERY OF ALANDYKE.

[THE END.]

The preparations at Sennicotts for the return of Prince Louis of Battenburg and his bride are being rapidly pushed forward. Sennicotts is capitably situated, about two miles north of Chichester, and, although the house is not large, the accommodation is admirably arranged, and the gardens are most tastefully laid out.

SIR RUPERT'S WILL.

CHAPTER IX.

Two years had passed away, bringing with them their various chances and changes, and on a May evening Mildred again sat in the library of Ingram Chase—not in the window recess this time, but at the table, busily engaged reading over a somewhat voluminous and legal-looking document.

Outside the sweet breath of the springtide was perfuming every soft breeze that blew; and in the Dutch garden, making a pretence of examining the tulips, were Maud Denver, and Mr. Selwin—the latter as hawk-eyed, and wiry-haired as ever, but still subtly changed since we saw him last. He was what Maud called "humanized," which meant that he did not hold the feminine sex generally in such cynical disfavour, and that he had shown himself particularly amenable to her own fascinations.

She and Mildred had been at the Chase nearly a month now—ever since the latter came of age—and the interval had been spent in preparing the deed of gift that she was still resolved on executing in favour of Roland Ingram. It was the theme on which Maud was speaking to the lawyer at the present moment.

"And to give up these estates to a man who has behaved as shamefully to her as he has seems to me little short of angelic," she exclaimed, with energy. "I only wish I could have him to myself for half-an-hour, and tell him what I think of him!"

Mr. Selwin was meekly silent—whether because he thought his friend deserved the half-hour's candid "talking to," or because he did not wish to disagree with the speaker is a moot question.

"See the offers she has had!" continued Maud, waxing more and more wrathful. "Why, when we were Paris there was a Russian Prince—a Prince—who simply worshipped her, and a German Count who developed into a drivelling idiot because she took no notice of him. Fancy a woman refusing to be a princess!"

Mr. Selwin acknowledged it required an amount of strong-mindedness that the sex generally did not possess.

"I should think so! I would have jumped at the chance if it had been given me."

"And I suppose nothing less than a prince would tempt you?" insinuated Mr. Selwin, edging himself a little closer.

Maud looked doubtful.

"Well, I won't say that exactly, because I don't suppose I shall ever be so lucky, and I've no wish to be an old maid."

"Old maids are mistakes," observed the lawyer.

"Yes, but the mistake is generally the fault of someone else, not their own. I am only twenty-one, so there is still hope for me."

"I envy the man that gets you," with a deep sigh.

"Do you? Well, I shan't be a bad wife so long as my husband behaves himself."

"And if he doesn't?"

"Oh! in such a case I shall let him know he hasn't married a dummy—that's all."

To judge from Maud's countenance the "all" in an event of this kind would prove no slight matter; but Mr. Selwin was a brave man, and not in the least dismayed at the prospect.

"What sort of husband do you think I should make?"

Maud eyed him from head to foot before replying.

"Pretty good, on the whole, bat a tartar when anyone happened to put you out," was her candid expression of opinion.

He bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"Do you feel inclined to try me? I am quite sure we should get on all right."

"But I'm not at all sure we should. In the first place, I'm a bad temper myself."

"I should take care not to provoke you."

"Then I hate short hair, and should insist on your wearing it long."

"I'll go to the chemist to-morrow and get a bottle of Mrs. Allan's Restorer, and apply it on the spot."

"Which spot?" interrupted Maud, mischievously, "the bald one?"

"All over," he said; "and the result will be patent in a few days, and you'll see me with locks like Tennyson's. What other obstacle can you suggest?"

"Oh! there are heaps, but—"

"None strong enough to prevent your accepting me, you would say," he interposed, taking her hand. "Come, Maud, you like me a little bit, don't you?"

Maud reluctantly admitted that she did not quite hate him.

"Then you'll promise to marry me?"

"No," she said, firmly. "I won't promise anything of the sort until I am assured of one thing. You used to believe Mildred had destroyed Sir Rupert's will. Do you still think so?"

"I have more faith in her than I used to have," he answered, evasively.

"But that will not do. I am as positive of her innocence as I am of the Heaven above me, and I am resolved to do my utmost to prove it. The summer before last, after Captain Ingram went away to India, I tried to induce papa to take the matter up and thoroughly investigate it, but he is such a dear old goose that he never did any good, so I determined that my husband—when I got one—should at least attempt it, and I won't promise to marry anyone unless he consents to do so."

"But, my dear Maud, think what a hopeless task you set me! There is not a shadow of evidence against anyone except Lady Ingram. She was the only person the destruction of the will could have benefited."

"Have you never suspected Louisa Pedley?"

The lawyer started in genuine astonishment.

"Never! She could have had no possible motive for the perpetration of such a crime."

"I am not so sure of that. She was in the house at the time, and could have reached the baronet's room without being seen."

"That is true; but she swore she did not leave her own apartment, and no one thought of doubting her, because she had nothing to gain by the lie. You see, in cases such as these, we always look first for the motive, and that is why everyone was so convinced of Lady Ingram's guilt. I confess I was very much prejudiced against her, and it is only lately, since she signed that deed of gift, that I have credited her with any good qualities whatever."

"She is the dearest, sweetest girl in all the world!" cried Maud, enthusiastically; "and, what's more, I'll prove it. You are wrong in saying Miss Pedley had no motive for wishing to get rid of the will. She had the very strongest that can actuate a woman. Revenge!"

"Revenge! Against whom?"

"Captain Ingram."

"What had he done to offend her?"

"Jilted her, I believe. From a few words he said the day I told you of when we met her at the Academy I fancied there had been something between them, and her subsequent conduct confirmed me in this impression, for it was clear she had betrayed who Mildred was out of jealousy. Well, I knew that her father had been curate at C—— when Ingram's regiment had been stationed there; and so I made inquiries, with the result of discovering that there had been a flirtation and tacit engagement between them, but that she had also let another man make love to her, and when Ingram discovered it he would not have anything more to do with her. Can't you understand how she would hate him with all the virulence of her small, low nature, and that she would seize the chance of depriving him of a fortune in order to vent her spite?"

Selwin nodded vigorously. This was a new light on the case, and gave it quite another aspect.

"Or perhaps she cherished a notion that she might make use of the will, and bribe him back to her with the promise of the estates," went on the young girl. "She is artful and unscrupulous enough for anything."

"In that case she would not have destroyed the will?"

"No, and my impression is that it still exists. I think if a shrewd and practical man—say yourself—were to take the matter up the truth might yet be discovered."

"I will do it!" exclaimed the lawyer, energetically. "And then, Maud, you will marry me?"

"Do the work before you ask for the reward!" she rejoined, saucily. "I don't say what foolish step I may be induced to take when I see Mildred's fair fame cleared before the world."

Here the lawyer behaved in a most unlegal manner, but what passed concerns only himself and Maud, so a veil may be drawn over their subsequent proceedings in the Dutch garden.

When they re-entered the house they found Mildred still in the library, poring over her documents.

"What a long time you have been!" she exclaimed, smiling.

"The tulips are so interesting, you know," said Maud, very innocently. "Mr. Selwin has been telling me how they were first brought from Holland, and all about them."

"Indeed! I did not know you were a botanical student, Mr. Selwin."

"Oh, he's a great many things that the generality of people know nothing about!" declared Maud, a little vaguely. "He hides his lights under a bushel, and one has to kick over the bushel before one discovers them."

Mildred smiled again, and began folding up her papers. She had altered in these last two years, her face had grown to look older, and more womanly, and there was that in her expression speaking of patient sorrow, none the less bitter because it was borne silently. And, indeed the time that had passed since that moonlight night on the river, when Ingram had told her he loved her, and then bade her an eternal farewell, had been fraught with the keenest pain; for, in spite of his hard words, in spite of herself even, the love she bore him burned on as steadily and as faithfully as if nothing had ever come between herself and its object. She could not root it out, for its fibres had entwined round her very heart, and only death would be strong enough to disentangle them!

She had been with the Denvers all the time, and part of it had been spent in wandering about from one foreign city to another, and trying in the distraction of constant excitement to obtain that greatest of boons, oblivion. She never heard of Ingram, beyond the fact that he had rejoined his regiment; but the remembrance of what he had been to her was always in her memory like a living presence, and she knew she should carry it with her into eternity.

All hopes of clearing herself from the stigma that still clung to her name, had long since vanished, and partly for that reason she had abstained from paying even a flying visit to Ingram Chase, until the attainment of her majority, and the consequent legal formalities made her presence a necessity.

She had brought Maud with her, and that young lady had whiled away the tedious very agreeably, and had evinced no desire to leave, so they had arranged to stay until the end of June, by which time all the requisite formalities would be got through, and Ingram Chase and its wide lands would become the property of Captain Roland.

"And then," said Mildred to herself, as she stood at the window looking out into the starlit dusk, "he will feel it a duty he owes to his family to marry and perpetuate the old name, and in the love of his wife and children he

will forget me, and the bitterness of the past will be requited by the happiness of the present. I wonder why pleasure and pain are so unequally divided—why some lives are all sunshine, and others all shadow? It seems unjust—unfair; and yet I suppose Heaven knows best, and the future will give us the key to solve the mysteries that perplex us."

She sighed heavily. If she had had anything to look forward to, she would not have minded, but there was nothing. Her life stretched before her in a long, desolate waste, lightened by no gleam of sunshine, not even an *ignis fatuus* glimmer of hope, and lonely with that solitude that is born of shattered dreams and a broken heart!

CHAPTER X.

"LINDORA VILLA" was one of a terrace of small, red-brick houses, with white stone facings, as like its brethren as two peas in a pod, and forming an average specimen of a suburban residence "combining cheapness with every modern advantage," and let at the modest rental of forty pounds per annum. There was a minute patch of garden in front, in which luxuriated some stunted specimens of the wallflower tribe which seemed to have had a struggle for existence with the London "blacks," and come off second best from the contest; a small pathway led to the door, and at this, one rainy afternoon when the skies were grey and the rain pouring down in uncompromising steadiness, Mr. Selwin, well wrapped up in ulster and leggings, knocked.

"Is Miss Pedley at home?" he asked, when the maid-of-all-work condescended to answer the summons—rapping her grimy face with an apron yet more grimy.

"Miss Pedley, or Miss Louisa?"

"The younger lady."

"No, it's a Saint's day, and she's gone to church—she's most particler in her Saint's days, she is."

This religious tendency of the person he had travelled up from Warwickshire to see was rather embarrassing to the lawyer; however, he said he would wait, and was therupon ushered into a room where he found a comfortable looking old lady dozing in an arm-chair, with her cap in her lap, and a handkerchief tied round her head. She was much taken aback at the entrance of the lawyer, and instantly began putting her toilet to rights, although Mr. Selwin begged her not to disturb herself in any way on his account. He was studying her face very carefully, and being somewhat of a physiognomist, soon pronounced a mental judgment as to her character, and determined to make an effort to solve the question which had brought him hither through her agency.

"I have come to see your niece on a little matter of business," he began, drawing his chair nearer; "I hear she is at church."

"Well, yes, and that's where she spends most of her time. You see, sir—"wagging her old head confidentially, "there is a young curate at St. Anne's, and Louisa has reached that age when young curates are a sort of last resource. I'm not married myself"—she laughed good-humouredly—"but I'm not such an old maid as Louisa."

Which was perfectly true, for Time had not had a revivifying influence on Miss Pedley, junior; it had accentuated her worst points, and made her more and more vinegary as it stole away her beauties, and planted crow's feet under her eyes.

"My dear madam, it is of something far more serious than young curates that I have come about," said Mr. Selwin very gravely. "In fact, I think that as you stand in the position of a parent towards Miss Louisa Pedley, it is my duty to acquaint you with the facts of the case."

"Dear me! Sir, what can be the matter?" in a voice of alarm—"surely Louisa has not been doing anything wrong!"

"Worse than that—she has committed a

crime that lays her open to the very severest penalties the law can inflict."

Poor Miss Pedley leaned back in her chair, gasping out a request for a smelling-bottle, and having provided her with that indispensable article, the lawyer continued,—

"I may as well come to the point at once. You are doubtless aware she was at Ingram Chase at the time of Sir Rupert's death, and the disappearance of his will; now, information has lately reached me that leaves no doubt that she was the thief, and that she took the document out of a feeling of animosity to Captain Roland Ingram, between whom and herself some love-passages had formerly passed. This being the case, there is only one alternative left her, either to confess her guilt and give up the will, or to submit to a public prosecution."

"A public prosecution!" shrieked the old lady, in a voice of utter horror. "Oh, surely it cannot be so bad as that. Why, it would kill me outright to have the name of Pedley, that has never had a stain on it, dragged through a police court!"

"I am very sorry for you, deeply grieved, but justice to the innocent lady who has been accused of the theft demands it."

"And are you sure Louisa is guilty—quite sure?"

"There is no room left for doubt; if there had been I should have hesitated before accusing her. Do you not think you could induce her to give up the will, and then I will promise on behalf of Lady Ingram to refrain from a public prosecution?"

"You don't know Louisa, or you wouldn't suggest such a thing. Sooner than give it up she would fight the matter out to the last penny she has got," said her aunt, shaking her head despondently.

Mr. Selwin considered a few minutes.

"Perhaps you may do something, my dear madam," he observed at length, insinuatingly.

"I Only tell me what it is, and if it will keep my name from disgrace you may depend upon it I shan't hesitate."

"Well then, it is probable you know where your niece keeps her more private and important papers, and if you were to search through them, and give me the will yourself, it might save a great deal of scandal that you are so anxious to avoid."

Miss Pedley started. She was in some considerable awe of her niece, and the idea of making a raid on her papers was rather perturbing; nevertheless, she felt even this would be better than seeing Louisa answering for her crime before a judge and jury. It never struck her to doubt the lawyer's word, or to imagine his accusation false. Perhaps her knowledge of her niece's character induced her to believe it might very easily be true.

"Has Miss Louisa Pedley a safe at her bankers, or does she keep her documents here?" queried Mr. Selwin, seeing his advantage, and pursuing it.

"She has a very strong brass-bound desk that was her father's, up in her bedroom, 'n I should imagine all her private papers are there."

"Then my dear Miss Pedley"—the lawyer came forward in his eagerness, and laid an impressive hand on her arm—"if you will take my advice you will let me look through that desk before your niece comes home. What time will that be, by-the-bye?"

The old lady glanced at the clock, where a little girl was swinging backwards and forwards under a glass shade.

"Not for another half-hour."

"Then we shall have ample opportunity for finishing our search."

"But," said Miss Pedley, nervously, "I don't like the idea of it—it seems dishonourable and unhand."

"I confess you are quite right, but surely in such a case as this the end justifies the means. I should be the last to suggest it if I were not so thoroughly convinced of its wisdom. Personally it does not make any difference to me, but it seems a pity that your name should be

dragged through the newspapers—as it mos assuredly will be—and, besides, Lady Ingram herself would be pained by a public inquiry."

"Suppose the will should not be there?"

"Then we are in exactly the same position as before, and there is no harm done. You shall stand by while I search, or if you prefer it you may search yourself."

The woman who hesitates is lost. Miss Pedley hesitated, and Mr. Selwin took advantage of her hesitation to exercise all his arts and persuasions, and at length they were successful, and she conducted him upstairs to a small, neat room, with rose-coloured calico and under white muslin draperies—or rather muslin that would have been white if it had never come in contact with London smoke. In one corner of the apartment was a table, and on it stood a large mahogany desk—a desk of ancient fashion, which had probably supplied the place of a modern safe some fifty years ago.

Now, amongst his other accomplishments, Mr. Selwin numbered the somewhat doubtful of being able to pick a lock, and he happened—by chance, he told Miss Pedley—to have provided himself with the requisite instruments for this delicate operation, so that after some minutes' manipulation, the lid of the desk was open, and its contents at the mercy of the unscrupulous hands that laid such sacrilegious touches on Miss Louisa's property.

Mr. Selwin was a practical man enough, but it must be confessed that he so far gave way to sentiment on this occasion as to grow rather pale, and his hand shook ever so slightly as he took out packet after packet of letters, some tied with blue ribbons—perhaps mementos of a past when Miss Pedley's eyes had been bluer and brighter than they were now, and lovers had been more plentiful.

Bundle after bundle was turned out on the table, then came the certificates of her parents' marriage and her own birth, but there was no sign of that particular document for which he sought; and when at length the last scrap of paper had been removed, Mr. Selwin began to look rather blank, and to fancy he must have come on a fool's errand.

"There is nothing else there, you see," observed Miss Pedley, who had been watching the proceedings with some curiosity, but more trepidation.

"Unless there be a secret drawer," added the lawyer, shrewdly, and therupon began an examination, measuring the distances, and making a mental calculation the while. His surmise was correct, for, after fumbling about a good while, he finally discovered a spring, which he pressed, and a tiny panel flew open, disclosing a small recess. In it was a blue paper document, folded up into a square, and this Mr. Selwin drew out and opened, Miss Pedley peering over his shoulder with her spectacles on, so that she might see to read the writing.

And the first words she saw were these.—

"This is the last will and testament of me, Rupert Ingram, Baronet, of Ingram Chase, in the county of Warwick."

By mere good luck Mr. Selwin contrived to catch the 5.30 down train from Paddington, but it was after nine o'clock before he got to Ingram Chase, where he found Mildred and Maud sitting together in the boudoir of the former. His first action was characteristic.

"Lady Ingram, I am come, first of all, to express my deep sense of contrition for the wrong I did you in connecting you with the disappearance of Sir Rupert's will," he said, straightforwardly. "You would be quite justified in refusing to forgive me, but I hope you won't."

She held out her hand with a sweet smile. "I can hardly blame you even. Circumstances were so much against me. But what has been the result of your journey?"

"This!" He drew from his breast-pocket the paper, and held it before her. "I have suc-

ceeded beyond my most sanguine expectations, for I have found the will itself."

Mildred half started from her chair, her eyes dilated, her cheeks flushed, a half strangled cry escaping her lips.

"Then my innocence can be proved?"

"Before all the world, and I will make it my business to see that it is!" he answered.

"Thank Heaven!" she exclaimed, fervently, and then she found herself clasped in the arms of Maud, who, half laughing, half crying, was so overcome with delight as to be absolutely incapable of speech—with her a most unusual phenomenon.

By-and-by Mildred stole quietly away, feeling that she must be alone for awhile, and then Mr. Selwin thought the time had come for putting in a word on his own behalf.

"Don't you think I have done pretty well?" he asked.

"Much better than I ever thought you capable of doing."

"Then what about my reward?"

Maud threw up her hands.

"The selfishness of you men! Directly you do anything worth speaking of you think it such an uncommon event that it deserves to be commemorated by a reward."

"But you promised—"

"I know I promised, and I'll keep my promise if you'll only give me time."

But this was just what Mr. Selwin objected to doing, and so by dint of many persuasions and all the coaxings he knew how to employ, he at length induced the young lady to consent to their wedding-day being "fixed for two months hence."

"And now," said Maud, "after all this triviality, let us talk of something serious. I suppose you will write to Captain—I beg his pardon, Colonel Ingram, and tell him what has happened?"

"Certainly—first thing to-morrow morning."

The lawyer kept his word, and a full account of the finding of the will was despatched to India. Some time must elapse before a reply could be received, and so Mildred left the Chase, and took up her abode again with the Denvers at Regent's Park, waiting with what patience she might for the progress of events. One morning she was surprised by a visit from the lawyer, who came in at about noon, looking rather grave.

"Maud is out," she said, after greeting him, and with the impression that it was his fiancée he had come to see, but on this point he quickly undeceived her.

"I have news that will surprise, if not grieve you," he said, hesitating a little. "The fact is, I got a telegram from Colonel Ingram yesterday morning, telling me that he was already in London, having come home on sick leave, and requesting me to see him immediately. I obeyed the summons, and went to the Grand Hotel last night, where I found him looking very ill."

He paused a moment, quietly heedful of the extreme pallor that had come upon his listener's face. Mildred said nothing, however, and he went on.

"I informed him of all that had transpired in his absence, and also of the deed of gift you executed before the will was found, and this morning early I sent for Maud, who had had an interview with him, and explained the history of what happened at Sunbury. I hope you won't think this proceeding uncalculated for my part. I acted as I thought for the best."

"I am sure you did," she answered, gently.

"And so Colonel Ingram asked me to bring you this note," he added, extending it towards her, and then going to the window and becoming absorbed in watching the sparrows while she read it. It was very short, containing only these words,—

"I am too ill to come to you, Mildred. Will you forgive the past, and come to me?"

"R. I."

Was she lacking in proper womanly pride that she forgot everything except her love—forgot the hard words he had said of her, the

harder thoughts he had cherished against her, and remembering only that the man to whom her heart had been given was lying ill and longing for her presence. She went and put on her walking attire, and came back to Mr. Selwin, saying she was ready to go with him.

They took a hansom to the hotel, and then were conducted upstairs to a sitting-room on the second floor. The lawyer opened the door, and after she had passed in shut it and retired, while Mildred paused on the threshold, half afraid to advance, and her eyes fixed on the figure lying on the couch—not the strong athletic lover, who had left her in the hot passion of what he thought a righteous anger, but a man wasted and worn, and bearing on his pale features the impress of recent suffering.

He spoke her name, and then the spell that had held her silent was broken, and she sprang forward, kneeling by his side, and hiding her face on his breast.

"My own darling!" he exclaimed, very softly. "Is the past quite cancelled, Mildred?"

"Quite. Never speak of it again," she murmured; "let it be as though it had never been."

"And you love me still?"

She did not answer in words, but the look she gave him was more eloquent than language.

"In spite of the change that has taken place in me?" he went on, with that species of self-torment that we are all prone at times to indulge in. "Perhaps I shall be a poor, weakly invalid all the rest of my life, even if I get well at all, which the doctors inform me is doubtful."

"Dearest!" she said, tenderly, "whatever happens you may be sure of this, that my love will never change. If I cared for you when you were strong and well I shall care for you even more—if such a thing were possible—in your weakness and pain. A woman's love once given—is given for ever."

And he, as he pressed his lips on hers, knew that she spoke truly, and that only death could part them now.

Colonel Ingram did not die. Hope is the very best medicine in the world, and under its influence he soon recovered his old health and vigour. And so it came about that in the sweet summer time, when the roses were in blossom, a double wedding took place, and Mildred and Maud stood together at the altar, although only the latter changed her name. Colonel Ingram no longer objected to taking the title, so his wife still rules at the Chase as "Lady Ingram."

There was a nine days' wonder in the county as soon as it became known Sir Rupert's will had been found, but no particulars were ever given by Mr. Selwin, except a public and emphatic assertion of Mildred's innocence; and Miss Louisa Pedley, when she discovered her loss, deemed that her best plan would be a complete silence, which she keeps most religiously to this day. She has not yet brought her curate to the point, but she is by nature persevering, so perhaps in the end success will crown her efforts.

Maud and Mr. Selwin agree perfectly, and the former says her only cause of complaint is that she has nothing to grumble at. She and her husband live in the village, but a great deal of their time is spent at Ingram Chase, over which broods the peace of utter content.

[THE END.]

In nature the valuable and the beautiful usually go hand-in-hand; and, if we do not always trace their union, it is because our limited experience has not yet fathomed all her secrets.

THE knowledge which we have acquired ought not to resemble a great shop without order, and without an inventory; we ought to know what we possess, and be able to make it serve us in need.

OPALS AND DIAMONDS.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE DAWN OF LOVE.

"MISS MAGGIE, my skiff has arrived at last. Will you come out early to-morrow morning, and let me row you up to Inchfield Woods? I came over on purpose to-night to ask you."

It was a sultry evening in the month of roses. There was hardly any breeze, the sun was just sinking to rest in his mantle of purple and gold, and the moon was beginning to show her round, silver face above the summits of the distant mountains. The air was heavy with the perfume of blossoming beans and the sweet scent of the woodbine. A nightingale was singing in the larch spinney; and Maggie, as she leaned on the stile leading to it, listening to the clear, ringing notes, and drinking in the loveliness of earth and sky, was deaf for once to the voice of her titled admirer. He waited for a few moments, and then, getting no answer, laid his hand on the bare white arm, which the short sleeve of her dress disclosed, and pressed it gently.

The girl started and turned to him, colouring brilliantly.

"I—I—beg your pardon—were you saying anything?"

"Yes, I was asking you if you would come out with me in the skiff to morrow morning. Will you?"

"I—I—think not," she stammered, hesitating.

That day she had received a letter from Terence—a pleading letter, full of endearments, begging her to write to him a little, only a little more tenderly, and a pang shot through her careless heart as she read it and thought of his steady devotion and unbounded love, and the way in which she was rejecting it.

"Why won't you?" demanded Sir Lionel, quite unaccustomed to be refused any request, and astonished therat.

"I—I—don't think I shall be up early," she replied, in more confusion.

"Not up early!" he repeated. "That is no excuse. Don't you care to come?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," she answered, eagerly; "you know I love being on the river. But—I don't think I ought to go," she added, despondingly.

"Why not?" he asked, in surprise, as it was no new or uncommon thing for her to pass several hours alone with him.

The girl raised her eyes to his at his query, and felt half-inclined to tell him that she was the promised wife of another man, and dared not, therefore, pass any more hours alone in his society, as it was becoming too dear to her. But as she hesitated he bent towards her, and taking her soft fingers in his, said softly,—

"Maggie, do come with me. All my pleasure in my boat will vanish if you are not with me."

She shook her head, and tried to draw her hand from his clasp, looking resolutely straight before her at the cowslip-bordered meadows.

"Why won't you come?" he went on, retaining his hold of the little trembling fingers.

"Have I offended you?"

"No, oh, no."

"Show me that I haven't, then, and come with me to-morrow," he pleaded. "Come to please me. You know no pursuit gives me pleasure now unless shared with you. Do you wish to make me miserable?"

"You know I do not."

"Say yes, then!" he whispered.

"Yes," she murmured, half-reluctantly, and felt as she spoke that she was a traitor to that other man who loved her so well.

The next morning was bright and cloudless, a rare summer's day. The sun shone brightly on hill and dale, lighting up the tender green of the varied foliage with his bright beams.

The lute voiced blackbird and speckled thrush were calling to each other as Maggie tripped along lightly through the many

coloured meadow grasses, weighted with dewdrops, on her way to the tray.

She had slept off her qualms and twinges of conscience, and was the same careless-hearted, frivolous butterfly as of old, ready for any amusement, any pleasure of the minute, no matter what it might cost herself or anybody else in the future.

"Am I late?" she asked, as she reached the riverside, and found Sir Lionel waiting for her.

"No, I think not," he answered, with a smile, "but I was rather early. Now, what do you think of her?" he continued, indicating his boat with a wave of the hand. "Do you like her?"

"Yes, she is a beauty!" responded Maggie, looking with delighted eyes at the skiff, which was built for speed, of polished American pine-wood, and was fitted with pale blue satin cushions and every convenience imaginable, while at the stern was fixed a dainty azure parasol, lace trimmed and boriboned, so that the steerer would be sheltered from the sun-rays. "I should like to row about in her all day long."

"So you shall, if you like. She is more yours than mine, you know. See," and he pointed to the back cushion, on which was embroidered in silver thread the name 'Maggie.'

"I have called her after you."

"I am very much flattered."

"Are you really?" he queried, doubtfully, as he took off his funnel coat, and rolled up the sleeves of his jersey.

"Yes, really."

"I don't see why you should be."

"Don't you?"

"No."

"Well you might have called her after heaps of other people."

"Yes, I might, but you see I didn't, and I think you know very well that if I gave her a name it would be yours," he remarked, pointedly.

"Indeed!" she said, making ineffectual attempts to drag up a broad-leaved, golden-chalice lily, to hide her confusion.

"Do you want that lily?"

"Yes, particularly."

"There it is, then," he said, cutting it from the parent flower with one stroke of his sharp knife, and tossing it on to her lap, "and I only hope that every wish of yours all through your life may be as easily and quickly gratified as that was."

"Thanks—so do I," she rejoined, and then there was silence between them for some time.

He settled down to his work, rowing a quick stroke, and sending the skiff along at a great pace, and she toyed with her flower, and ever and anon glanced at her *vis-à-vis*, and thought how well his flannels became him, and how handsome and high-bred he looked.

The baronet's face was a singularly handsome one, straight featured and regular, clean shaven, save for a heavy black moustache that hid his short upper lip and drooped to his chin. His hair was black and glossy as the raven's wing, and close cropped in the military style; his skin a clear, pale olive, and his eyes dark hazel. They were the only feature in the perfect face that could be found fault with. They were long-lashed, and well-placed, but there was a restless glitter in them, and at times a vacant stare, that spoke plainly of incipient madness, and spoilt their beauty.

Maggie, however, didn't notice this; she only thought she had never seen a more pleasing face; and then remembering that she had no business whatever to think about him at all, she turned away her head and looked at the waving willows that seemed to be whispering other-world secrets to each other as they shadowed the rippling river, at the rushes rustling in the gentle breeze, at a rustic bridge with a tree leaning over it, and its background of sky all mirrored in the water, and listened to the singing of the stream as it flowed over its sandy bed, and the voices of the feathered choristers clustered amid the moonlight coloured May blossoms, and the splash of the

fish as they leapt in the air, and then fell back into their native element.

"What are you thinking about?" inquired Sir Lionel, breaking the silence.

"I hardly know," answered his fair companion, "nothing very important."

"Your thoughts were not of me, then?"

"Certainly not," she answered, untruthfully, her lovely face blushing carnation red. "How vain you are! Why should I think of you?"

"There is no reason, of course. I wish there was, and I wish you would think of nothing and nobody else."

"Wouldn't that be rather monotonous?" she replied, jestingly, to hide her embarrassment and confusion.

"I have not found it so, and I, for some weeks past, have thought and dreamt of but one person.

"She is my vision in the night,
My dreaming in the day."

he said, pointedly.

"You will get tired of your 'dreaming' after a time."

"No, I think not."

"How can you tell? You may."

"I may, of course, yet I don't think it likely."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm in love, Miss Randal, and I'm not the sort of man to love lightly. With me it is for ever and aye."

"You in love!" she ejaculated, the carnation red again stealing over cheek and brow.

"Yes; does that surprise you?"

"No-o," she murmured.

"Yes, I am in love, Maggie," he went on, as he fastened the boat to a gnarled root that projected from the bank, and, stepping over the satin-cushioned seats, dropped on his knees before her in a way that made the frail craft sway ominously. "Can you guess who it is with?"

"No," she replied, shortly, lowering her head to hide the tell-tale blushes, and wishing that she was anywhere—anywhere out of the reach of the man to whose tender words she had no shadow of a right to listen.

"Shall I tell you, then?" he queried, softly, his eyes on the down-drooped blonde head he had learnt to love so well.

"If you think it concerns me," she answered, coldly, struggling to maintain her hard-won composure.

"I think it does—at least, I hope it does. You are the woman I love, Maggie. Tell me, dearest, is there any hope for me—any chance of your ever returning my affection, which, believe me, is deep and sincere?"

He waited eagerly for her answer, but she was silent, shading her averted face with the hand that was free.

At first, at his words, a mighty throb of exultation stirred her heart, at the thought that the prize, the catch of the coast, the much sought-after baronet, with his old name and broad acres, was at her feet, captive, conquered by her, bow and spear.

Then came the sickening, chilling remembrance of Terence O'Hare, the poor struggling artist, whose promised bride she was, whose last words had been a pleading to her to love him always, and be true to him; and as she remembered, a shudder ran through her delicate frame from head to foot, and she experienced that vague, unaccountable sense of fear with which, despite his great love for her, he had ever inspired her, and she felt powerless to make any answer to the man kneeling at her feet.

"Maggie, have I startled you, child?" went on Sir Lionel, at last, as he felt the hand he held tremble in his grasp. "Have I been mistaken—presumptuous—in thinking you cared for me a little, and that in time you might grow to love me well enough to be my wife? Answer me!" he implored, as she still remained silent. "I will never speak on this subject to you again, if you tell me you do not care for me, as I have fondly imagined you do."

"It is not that," she said at last, in a low, strained voice, "only—only—you must speak to me like this."

"Mustn't speak to you like this!" he cried; "why not?"

"I can't tell you why; only I can't—I daren't listen to you."

"Daren't? My dearest, what do you mean by that?"

"Don't ask me," she moaned, "don't ask me; let me go."

"One moment, Maggie, and I will take you home. Tell me now, truly, do you dislike me? Is my society displeasing to you?"

"No, you know it isn't," she answered, with a sob.

"And—and—do you care for any one else?"

His heart beat nearly to suffocation as he waited for her to speak.

"No," she said at last, slowly and heavily, "I don't care for any one else."

Which was the truth. The girlish love she had felt for O'Hare had vanished into thin air before the superior attractions of the baronet, both monetary and personal, and the poor, careless butterfly's heart, or what did duty for it, was given to Sir Lionel Molyneux:

"That is enough," he rejoined, releasing her hand. "As I know now from your own sweet lips that you are fancy free I shall not despair of winning you for my wife at some future time," and, loosing the boat and picking up the sculls, he rowed rapidly back to Wingfield, and escorted his fair charge to the Parsonage door, where he left her, with a tender pressure of the hands.

"Where on earth have you been?" demanded Maud, sharply, as the young girl entered the parlour. "Look at the time. Breakfast has been cleared away over an hour; and, gracious me, what's the matter? You have been crying."

"I don't want any breakfast," said Maggie, with a sob.

"Don't you? That is rather extraordinary. Your appetite generally is good enough. And what is this fuss all about? Have you been quarrelling with Sir Lionel?"

"No-o."

"What is it, then? Come, tell me."

"He—he—he—asked me to marry him," replied the youngest Miss Randal between her sobs and gasps, "and—and—I was obliged to tell him I couldn't listen to him. And—and, Maud, I love him, and it will break my heart!"

"You goose!" rejoined her sister, calmly, "hearts don't break in the nineteenth century, and there is no reason whatever for your not listening to him, or loving him, for the matter of that."

"But Terence," ejaculated the young fiancée.

"Well, what of him?"

"I have promised to be his wife, and I can't marry both."

"Certainly not, unless you wish to commit bigamy, and be imprisoned for so doing. But surely you will not let a trivial thing like your girlish promise to O'Hare stand in the way of your becoming mistress of Molyneux Hall, and 'my lady' as well?"

"I don't know," answered the other, doubtfully; "Terry loves me very dearly, and—and I'm rather afraid of him."

"Pooh! What have you got to be afraid of? And as for his love, if it is worth anything it will make him only too glad that you should marry a rich man, and enjoy every luxury money can procure. Just think of the difference. As Terence's wife you will have to live in apartments, or at best in a poky little house at Hampstead or Hammersmith, or some other dreadful suburban spot, and wear cleaned gloves, and turned dresses, and shabby bonnets, and, perhaps, cook your own dinner, and scrub—"

"Oh, don't!" interrupted Maggie, with a gesture of disgust.

"On the other hand," continued her sister, calmly, "as Lady Molyneux you will live in

and be mistress of one of the finest places in this part of England, with its private chapel, its vineyards, orchards, peach-houses, melon-pits, conservatories, park, and woodlands; its grouse-moors and rabbit warren, its splendid hall and gorgeous living-rooms, and its gallery of old ancestral portraits, and you will have an ample allowance for dress, could wear silks, and satins, and velvets; and, then, there are the family jewels and the famous suite of opals and diamonds, which, of course, would be yours as the baronet's wife."

"Yes, I suppose so," said the young girl, reflectively, a flush on her cheek, and a gleam in the violet eyes, which were no longer bedewed with tears. "I should like to see them."

"So should I. They are magnificent, I believe. You can easily have your wish gratified by saying 'Yes' to Sir Lionel. As his

friends you could, of course, ask to see them, and wear them, too," urged the tempestuous, seeing her way clear to wreaking her vengeance on the man who had slighted her.

But Maggie shook her head, and murmured something about not daring to, and never being able to face Terence again if she broke her plighted troth.

"You are an unmitigated little fool," exclaimed Maud, hotly. "Your making a good match would be an advantage not only to yourself but to us also; and if that is your only reason I consider it a very trashy one, for I will see Terence, and tell him the state of affairs, and I promise you he shall not interfere with you, or molest you in any way. Well, there," she went on, soothingly, as the poor butterfly, torn by conflicting emotions, hardly knowing what to do, burst into a passion of tears, "don't cry; it will spoil your eyes. We won't talk about it any more now. I will get you a cup of coffee, and then you must come and look at these plates of costumes that Eunice has sent down. We must choose our dresses for the fancy ball at the Molyneux's give next month. And only think, Lady Molyneux is going to make us a present of our dresses. Isn't it kind? I shall choose a Spanish dress, as it may come in useful afterwards. Do you like this Pompadour, or do you think this Watteau the prettiest for Kate?" and Maud held up two exquisitely-coloured pictures for Maggie to look at, and soon the two fair heads were bent side by side over the gay illustrations.

CHAPTER V.

OPALS AND DIAMONDS.

"Do you think so, Eunice?"

"I am certain of it," and Miss Molyneux raised her dark eyes, and looked straight at her mother, with conviction in her whole aspect.

The two ladies sat in a lovely little boudoir, all blue satin and filmy lace, filled with easy couches, and inviting chairs, and fragile round tables, strewn with nick-nacks, Chinese carvings, Binares brass-work, Capo di Monti porcelain, Venetian glass, Ceylon ivory, Italian clay-work, Dresden figures, Sevres vases, Roman cameos, and all the thousand and one rather useless but beautiful things that people who travel much collect.

The windows of the room commanded a lovely view; below were the mossy, ivy-grown terraces, leading to the quaint gardens of the Hall, beyond which the park, with its herds of dappled, graceful deer, and grand, old-world trees, stretched away for over a mile; and then came a sweep of woodland, and the silvery sheen of the river, as it wound its way 'twixt emerald-clad banks, shaded by ash and elm; and in the blue distance a great range of mountains bounded the view, and shut out the glimpse of the restless ocean, which fretted and lapped their base on the other side.

"What makes you certain?" inquired Lady Molyneux, after a pause.

"Well, he is always there, on some pretext

or other, and when he isn't there he contrives to invite, or to make me invite her here. Then he often talks of her, and continually takes down bouquets or bonbons, or the little trifles a man generally offers a woman when he is, or is going to be in love, and his habits have altered considerably. He no longer cares for fishing, or riding, or shooting, or any of his old pursuits. He is nearly all day long on the river in that smart gingerbread skiff, and I shrewdly suspect he is not alone on these occasions. But, above all, his eyes betray him. They are always on Maggie's face; and if he turns them away for an instant back they go, as surely as the needle does to the Pole. That, my eyes, is a certain sign of the tender passion. No man looks long and often at a face unless he is very much in love with it."

"No, I should think not."

"And then his thoughts of habitation significant. Ever since the days of Biguet with the Tuft love has worked well-known transformations, and I actually caught my self-possessed brother blushing redly, like a schoolgirl, the other day when we met the Rendells suddenly in the lane, near Hartington Oak."

"If all this is true, I am afraid what you say is true."

"Afraid, mother? Would you object to Maggie as a daughter-in-law? I thought she was a great favourite of yours."

"So she is, and I should have no objection to her as a daughter if circumstances were ascertained. As it is—well, as it is, I hoped and prayed he would never fall in love—never marry," finished the older lady, with a deep sigh.

"It might be beneficial for him, and perhaps your fears may never be realized."

"Perhaps not. But what I dread for him in an affair of this sort is a refusal. If he loves very devotedly, and she rejects him, the anguish and grief consequent upon the annihilation of his hopes may send him out of his mind. You are aware that he has never known what it is to have an ungratified wish!"

"Yes, and I think he will not be disappointed in the present instance. Look!" and Eunice drew her mother to the window, and pointed at a group coming up the avenue under the shade of the branching limes.

First came sober Kate, with fox-hunting, sport-loving Squire Thornton; then Maud, walking between the Comte de Villefile and Captain Clinton, the latter looking black as a thundercloud at the attentions the Frenchman was paying the woman he intended to honour by asking to be his bride; for the gay, dashing Hussar had been fairly caught and meshed in the web of Maud's bright hair, and felt he would never be at rest until she had said "Yes" to his pleading, and given him the right to scowl other men off his preserves; and bringing up the rear were Maggie and Lionel.

The girl was in a white cambric, liberally trimmed with filmy lace, and in her hand she swung her great shady hat by its blue ribbons. She was walking out in the middle of the road, and the sun blazed down on her unprotected golden head, making a sort of halo round it, and giving to her beauty an unearthly brightness.

She was looking up at the baronet, with a smile on her scarlet mouth and a glad light in the black-lashed violet eyes, while he was bending over her with an air of passionate devotion, which showed in every gesture.

"Heaven grant he may not," said the mother, looking at the son, who had cost her, since his birth, many and many a bitter pang, many and many an hour of anxious agony. "It is no wonder he loves her; she is very beautiful!"

"Yes; but not very intellectual."

"That will be all the better. What Li wants is a soft, sweet, little woman, who will cling to him for protection, and defer to him always. A strong, self-reliant woman would annoy and worry him."

"Yes, perhaps you are right."

"I think I am in this case. And I must try and let her see that she will be welcome to me, if she makes my poor boy happy."

So it was a very tender, cordial greeting that Maggie received from the châtelaine of Molyneux Hall, and one that put her quite at her ease, for hitherto, though the lady had been kindness itself, her stately manners and elegant appearance had awed her guest somewhat.

"Have the dresses come, Eunice?" inquired Sir Lionel after lunch, when they were all lounging on the lawn, lying on the trim turf, swinging in netted hammocks, or reclining in basket-chairs, softly cushioned, under the shade of a great clump of horse-chestnuts.

"Yes, they came this morning."

"Are they satisfactory?"

"Well, I hardly know, except with regard to my own, and that is very satisfactory. I didn't look at the others."

"We had better overhaul them, then, by-and-by. As the ball is to-morrow night, we won't have much time for alterations, if any are required."

"Oh, I think they will be all right. Cleanments always sorts out everything complete, and any trifling alteration I'll see can make."

"Of course. Still I have no doubt the Misses Randal would like to have a glimpse of their costumes. Wouldn't you?"

"Yes," responded Maud, who was generally speaking.

"And so should I," said Captain Clinton, with languid impressment. "I am extremely anxious to see my turn-out as a gay cavalier."

"Come along then," rejoined Sir Lionel. "It's too hot for tennis, so we had better go now and inspect our attire. Where were they put, Eunice?"

"In the library."

And thither the young people trooped, laughing and chatting gaily, like so many magpies. The sombre library, with its heavy crimson velvet draperies, massive oak furniture, and row upon row of ancient tomes, looked strange indeed with the gay tinselled dresses scattered about over the chairs and tables.

"This is charming!" cried Maud, as Eunice showed her a Spanish costume of yellow satin, black lace, and crimson roses.

"Charming, indeed!" echoed Captain Clinton, who, as usual, was at her side. "You will look too lovely in it, and will break no end of hearts—that is to say," he added in a low tone, "if I don't keep you all to myself and allow you to do so. I don't think I shall, though."

The girl flashed a swift glance at him out of her pretty eyes, which made the gallant Hussar's heart beat quicker, for it was full of tenderness, and then went on inspecting the dresses.

"I wonder what I shall look like with powdered hair?" said quiet Kate, reflectively. "Rather funny, I imagine."

"Why should you?" demanded Eunice. "Dark women always look well powdered, so you need have no fears."

"Do you like this?" she went on a minute later, holding up the dress of a French marquise of Marie Antoinette period.

"Yes, certainly. *C'est magnifique*," said the Comte quickly, though he was not the person addressed. "It will suit you'd *merveille*."

"I am glad you like it," responded Miss Molyneux, looking at him with a faint smile on her handsome mouth.

"I like it immensely, especially as I have chosen the dress of Louis Seize. We shall be of the same period."

"Yes, Li, did you order your dress? It is not here."

"Yes. Peyton has put it in my room. I don't intend to exhibit it till to-morrow."

"That isn't fair. All our trappings were to be criticized beforehand."

"Just so, and I thought the criticisms on mine might be adverse; so as I have a particular reason for wishing to wear the costume I have chosen, I determined not to show it till the evening of our dance."



[MAGGIE REMAINED SPELL-BOUND AT THE SIGHT OF THE COSTLY JEWELS.]

"That is decidedly shabby."

"Perhaps it is. But your thinking so won't make me alter my determination. Now, Miss Maggie," he added, turning to her, "come and see your finery," and she went with him to a chair in a distant corner of the room, on which was spread out a long robe of white satin, embroidered with beads, which glittered like icicles, bordered with snowy fur; beside it was the branch of a tree, frosted and shining, a white fur mantle, and a pair of little white shoes, thickly encrusted with beads.

"How lovely!" ejaculated Maggie, clasping her hands in delight, for she had never before possessed such a gorgeous gown. "How exquisite!"

"Yes, but you ought to have a suite of pearl and diamond jewellery to wear with it," said Maud.

"Yes."

"You have nothing but gold ornaments, so must go without any."

"Not at all," said Sir Lionel, hastily. "If Miss Maggie will wear them, my mother has a suite of opals and diamonds, which she will lend her, I know, with great pleasure."

"Oh, thank you," gasped the young girl, almost overcome at this unexpected honour.

"It is very kind of you, Sir Lionel," Maud quickly remarked, hardly able to veil the triumph in her tones. "Opals and diamonds are exactly the right stones to wear with a costume of this sort. The flash of the diamonds, and the rainbow light of the opals, will relieve the dead whiteness."

"Exactly so. I am glad I thought of them. I will go and see my mother about them now."

"Miss Randal, my cavalier's attire has not received the seal of your approval," said a voice at Maud's elbow; and, turning, she saw Captain Clinton's fair, handsome face near her own. "Won't you come and criticise it?"

"Of course, with pleasure," and with one warning glance at her younger sister, who was leaving the room with the baronet, she went

with Clinton, and admired his blue velvets and pointlace, and told him it would become his style of good looks marvellously well, but regretted that he had not chosen a Spanish dress, as her own was of that nation, and said so many pretty things, and looked so many pretty things, and flattered him so judiciously, and made herself so generally agreeable, that the gallant Hussar mentally registered a vow that ere many hours had elapsed he would ask her to be his bride, and go to distant India—where his regiment was stationed—when his leave expired.

The next evening, as the three Miss Rands were dressing for the ball, in one of the great oak-panelled guest chambers at the hall, a tap came at the door, and Lady Molyneux's maid entered, carrying in her hand a huge bouquet of white flowers, and a large leather box.

"For Miss Maggie, with Sir Lionel's compliments," she said, depositing the box and bouquet on the dressing-table. "Can I assist you ladies now?" she inquired. "I have finished dressing my lady."

"No, thanks," said Maud, hastily, eager to get the woman out of the room, and examine the contents of the leather box. "Williams has been helping us, and we are, as you see, nearly dressed, so we won't trouble you, Brewshaw."

"Thank you, miss," and to the girl's intense relief she left the room.

"Now to look at these famous jewels."

The key was attached to the handle of the case, and it seemed an age before Maud could untie the ribbon. At last she did so, and unlocking it threw back the lid.

A cry broke from the two eldest, but Maggie remained spell-bound, silent, overwhelmed, at the sight of the costly jewels.

There they lay in their bed of purple velvet, flashing, sparkling, gleaming, throwing out a thousand iridescent lights, beautiful beyond description, brilliant as the play of summer sun on dancing waters, as the glow-worm in the

dusk of evening, as the crystalline snow on Alpine heights.

"What glorious stones!" ejaculated Kate, astonished out of her habitual sedateness. "Lucky girl to be allowed to wear them."

"Isn't she?" chimed in Maud, adding reflectively with her usual worldliness, "I wonder what they are worth?"

"Thousands!"

"I suppose so. Come, Maggie," she continued briskly, rousing herself from her contempt of the jewels, "let me fasten them on. Time is going, everyone will be here soon. Mind you don't lose any of them."

"I—I—think—I would rather not wear them," faltered Maggie, shrinking back.

"Not wear them? Good heavens, why?"

"I—I—might lose them, as you say, and—opals—are unlucky stones, and bring misfortune to the wearer."

"Pooh! Nonsense! What old women's tales have you been listening to?"

"None. Only it is well-known that O—"

"Are you going to make a fool of yourself now, at the eleventh hour?" demurred Maud, with contemptuous coolness, though she was secretly raging with anger at the sudden contumacy of the goose, who was to lay golden eggs for her and the rest of the family of Randal.

"No, only they are not necessary, and I would much rather not wear them."

"Nonsense. All this dead white requires some relief, and, remember, you have nothing for your hair. Let me just clasp this coronet on your head, and the necklace round your throat. If you don't like the effect you can take them off," and before Maggie could make any further objections, she deftly clasped the magnificent necklace, with its fiery, pendant opals, round her throat, and arranged the coronet amid her unbound, sunny tresses.

"Now look and tell me if it is not an immense improvement."

(To be continued.)



[THE BRIDE'S SUSPICIONS AWAKENED.]

NOVELLETTE.]

A BURIED LIFE.

CHAPTER I.
SANDFIELD.

"No, dear," said Bertram Ravensworth, as he addressed a fair girl of eighteen, whose head, as it rested on his broad shoulder, came in very close proximity to his tawny moustache, for he bent low that she might catch his words; "there are no hedgerows to the lane at all, not a single violet or primrose excepting in the baskets of the flower-sellers is to be found there. And in the place of your own shady trees you will find nothing but bricks and mortar, omnibuses and vehicles of every description running to and fro all the day and half the night long, and men and women ever hurrying onwards, some with happy faces, as though on pleasure bent, but the majority wearing a haggard expression of countenance, more as if they were forced to live than that their life brought them any happiness. A big, busy, London lane it is, darling. Does my Daisy think she could be happy there?"

Daisy Mortram raised her pretty head, with its golden crown, and looked up into the face of her lover.

"With you I should be happy anywhere!" she said.

He pressed the girl closer to his side, as he impressed a fond kiss on her upturned face, whilst a sigh almost inaudible escaped him.

It was a quiet, sequestered spot where the lovers sat on the banks of one of those grand broads of water for which Norfolk is famous; the tall rushes grew at their feet, and as they waved to and fro in the soft summer air seemed to do obeisance to them, whilst the waterlilies floated on the breast of the silvery ripples, only giving way as a majestic swan or a little rowing-boat would cross their course,

whilst ever and anon the cry of a wild duck would disturb the stillness of the scene.

The sun had sunk far in the West when, Bertram reminding his companion that there was a heavy dew falling, they arose, and sauntering down the side till they reached where the waters ran into a narrow, winding river they crossed a marsh, and emerged through a gate into the main road, along which they continued until a thatched-roofed house just peeping through the trees which surrounded it came in view.

A hawthorn hedge divided it from the highway, and at a distance from each other were two gates—a large five-barred one painted white, which led to the principal entrance, and the other called the kissing-gate, which led to the stables and outhouses of the Rookery, the title given to Farmer Mortram's home, from the fact that the trees surrounding the same were laden with nests, whose occupants would keep up a continual caw, caw, from morn to night.

At the latter entrance they stopped; it seemed so quiet and peaceful that each appeared unwilling to disturb the serenity of the scene, as silently they stood in each other's embrace watching the glorious beauty which the sun had left reflected on the clouds as he sank behind them on the one side; whilst on the other every leaf seemed at rest, and a settled gloom pervaded all, through which no object but the white gate seemed visible.

"I must go in now, dear," Daisy at last said, as a rock, which kept bad hours, returned to his home with a caw, which aroused them from their reverie.

"I suppose it must be," returned her lover, as opening the gate for her to pass through he released her, save for the little hand which he retained, until on the other side over the obstacle which divided them, he once more pressed her to his bosom, and imparted a parting kiss on her ruby lips.

He stood where she had left him until her

receding figure was lost in the darkness and the bang of a distant door assured him of her safety, when taking a cigar from his pocket he lit the same, and still continued resting against the gate as he smoked.

The sigh he smothered when she was near he now audibly repeated; there was not a sound to disturb his reverie, and he remained buried in thought until the weed was almost expended.

He was about to move when a rabbit ran past to the adjoining field. He gave a sudden start.

"What a fool I am," he said, "afraid of my own shadow since then—I, who used to be so fearless. Oh, Heaven! it is terrible to bear, but too late to retract!"

He raised his hat with one hand, whilst with the other he was about to raise his handkerchief to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, when, with a groan, he let it fall to the ground, where it lay with a dark stain on its fleecy whiteness.

"Pahaw!" he said, as stooping he picked it up. "Of course, I used it this morning to bind my cut finger."

But at the moon arose bright and clear in the heavens it was the white and terrified face of a man on which she threw her light as he wended towards Sandfield Manor.

Bertram Ravensworth was a rising barrister, who had during the long vacation accepted the invitation of an old college chum to visit him for the enjoyment of the fishing and shooting which his home county so well afforded.

Jack Blessington, his host, was a jovial kind of fellow, who had been destined by his family to become the spiritual father of many, but Jack assured them from the beginning it was a mistake; it would only be bringing the Church into ridicule and himself into trouble if they ever put him into a pulpit.

He was no worse than most, but could not be hypocrite enough to preach to others a doctrine he did not carry out himself, and he

could no more renounce the world and its pleasures than he could live without eating; and, as at that particular time an old aunt, with whom he had been a great favourite, happened to die, leaving him the master and ten thousand a-year, Jack troubled himself no more about the matter, but felt very much at his ease as a country gentleman, a life which appeared to suit him in every respect.

He had chambers in town, where he would mostly spend the winter months, but when the hot season set in he would induce two or three friends to return with him to the country, or accompany him for a cruise in his yacht when they had tired of the fishing, riding, shooting, and the society which the surrounding families afforded; and so it happened that he had succeeded in persuading Bertram, who was nothing loth, to leave for awhile his dusty rooms in St. James, to pass a few weeks with him at Sandfield Manor.

It had always puzzled Jack whatever persuaded the latter to remain in such a place, when he could have had far better accommodation in Lincoln's Inn, with fresh air, or even have had a place a little way out at no greater expense; but whenever the subject was mentioned Bertram would reply that the hired moving, the distance was convenient for his office, and briefs were not so plentiful then as to make any change; besides, his father, who had been a leather merchant, had lived there before him; and although no one was left him now but the old housekeeper who had been in the family since he wore petticoats and buckled shoes, still he did not care to find fresh quarters.

And so Jack, whenever he was in town, would visit his friend in his home, whilst he declared he could make neither head nor tail of, and be waited on by the old domestic, who appeared almost as ancient as the walls themselves.

They were very old friends—he and Bertie, both of whom now were from twenty-five to thirty years of age; and Jack, having a love for antiquity, had once, when visiting the latter, gained permission to explore his habitation, mounting a broad staircase until he reached the attics; and descending to the kitchens beneath with the greatest enjoyment, and would have carried his search lower still, to which he felt sure a door in the latter would have led him had not the same been firmly secured, and, believing what the old servant said, that it would not open, he was satisfied; but a few days later, having been called downstairs by Bertram to see some puppies he had in the backyard, he was surprised, on glancing into the kitchen as he passed, to see Dorothy (the housekeeper) emerging from the same, which she noiselessly and hastily closed behind her as her eyes fell on him, remaining with her back against it until he joined Bertram.

"Deuced strange that," thought Jack, as he expressed to Bertie his opinion respecting his canine friend; but the woman's behaviour seemed to him so odd that he could not avoid remarking it to his friend.

Bertram dropped the pup he was holding, which gave a cry of pain as it fell on the hard stones, and Jack almost started in his turn as he watched the strange expression which came over the face of the former—an expression which passed away in a hollow laugh as he declared he must be dreaming; the door had not been opened since some alterations were made years ago.

It was now six weeks since Bertram had become the guest of Jack Blessington, and, although the latter had a very good idea of the sort of friendship existing between him and the former's pretty daughter, still he had in no way made him his confidant; and he was rather surprised on his return on this particular evening to hear that he had determined to make Daisy Mortram his wife.

Jack was smoking by the open window, his only companion a little rough terrier, to whom he would address an occasional sentence as the latter wagged his tail in mute reply, but as a

footstep was heard approaching he gave a low growl.

"Down, Rough," said Jack, as Bertram entered the room, which, although in obedience to his master the dog did, it was in sulky, half-suppressed rage, as, with his head resting on his paws, he jealously watched every movement of that master's friend.

"He'll never be chums with you, Bertie," said the former as, lazily turning, he referred to Rough's unfriendly behaviour; "but I am glad, old fellow, you have come in," he continued, "we, although a dog is very well in his way, still can't keep up a one-sided conversation hour after hour without it becoming in the end rather wearisome."

"I should have been in before," replied Bertram, as he accepted a cigar from the master friend held out to him. "But it was such a glorious evening I could not draw myself from the enticing influence."

"And did this influence not rest on your own senses?—and was it—presume!—that you accomplished the benefit of an early autumn sunset?" asked Jack, in a bantering tone.

"No, Mr. Blessington, I was not alone," was the reply. "But have done, Jack, with your tomfoolery!" said Bertram, as he threw away the match with which he had lighted his cigar. "You may as well know the truth—I am going to be married!"

Rough, who had been long watching his opportunity, now gave a snap at the toe of Bertram's green leather boot, which caused the latter to give him a kick, sending him yellling into another side.

"What a beastly cur it is," he said.

"Don't take kindly to you, Bertie, but I never knew him to be like it before. However, don't mind the dog. Not much harm done, and I am dying to hear of your matrimonial engagement. The lady's name I can guess. But when is it coming off?"

"Hold hard, Jack!" replied the other, as that gentleman was breathlessly proceeding with a string of questions. If you go on at that rate I shall tell you nothing. I am engaged to Miss Mortram, the sweetest girl in England!"

"Europe," put in Jack.

"And after a short visit to town, to put things in order, I shall return to Sandfield to claim my bride. The old people have given their consent, and before the village bells ring out the Christmas chimes they will joyfully resound to our wedding!"

"Hurrah!" exclaimed his host, as he threw his smoking-cap into the air, and Rough barked doubtfully. "But I say, Bert, you are never going to take the girl to that antediluvian dwelling of yours, are you?"

"And why not?" asked the other.

"Why not? Because it is so lively, old fellow!" replied his friend, ironically. "And should she hear the unearthly sounds I heard the one night I did sleep within its walls, if she is not back in Sandfield before another sunset my name's not Jack!"

"What do you mean?" asked Bertie, in an angry tone.

Jack was about to burst into a fit of laughter, but turning to pick up his cap his eyes fell on the face of his friend, which appeared white and ghastly in the growing darkness.

"Good heavens!" he said. "Bertie, what is the matter? Do you think I am such a fool as to believe in ghosts and goblins?"

"I should think not" was the reply. "But Daisy, who is to be its mistress, has raised no objection to live in the old house, which family connections have endeared to me. I should not wish any such childish nonsense to reach her ears, and the more so, as you may be sure I shall do all I can to make it attractive to her."

A servant now entering with the lamp, and to announce that supper was ready, the conversation dropped for a time, and when it was again resumed the subject of the old house was not alluded to.

CHAPTER II. THE WEDDING.

MR. AND MRS. MORTRAM had taken a great fancy to their future son-in-law, and most of the young ladies in the village envied Daisy the lot that was in store for her.

To be engaged was considered a great thing in Sandfield, where beauties were scarce; and whilst some were envious of the farmer's daughter, amongst most she was considered of far greater importance since the secret of her intended marriage had leaked out, whilst Daisy herself thought no one could be so happy as she was, and no one as good as Bertie.

The latter had returned to London, but scarcely a day passed that he did not write to her of the house he was preparing for his bonnie bride, and the efforts he was making to give a modern air to the old home.

Jack Blessington had placed his house at the disposal of his old friend, hoping he would give him the privilege of providing the wedding breakfast; this, it being more spacious than the Mortram's home, and also serving tastefully to the old people.

There was much excitement in the village owing to the approaching nuptials, and mysterious boxes, bearing the names of some great London firms, were almost daily arriving at the little railway station.

"How lovely!" exclaimed Aggie Moore, a friend of Daisy's, as she was present during the time the latter was trying on a dark blue costume composed of velvet and satin, more which set on to the greatest advantage the blonde beauty of the fair woman. "Oh, don't I wish I was young!"

"Why?" said the other, as though the question had been a needless one.

"Why? Just look here!" and she took up the veil of Honiton lace, which was destined on the morrow to adorn the golden head of her friend, and playfully let it fall over her own black tresses. "Shouldn't I look nice?"

"If that is all you envy me for, Aggie, it is not much," said Daisy, "for was it (and she pointed to a tiny tear in the fleecy veil) happiness as frail as this, it would not last long."

"Don't talk stuff," said the girl. "Well, I only wish I had the chance, I'd run the risk of any future trouble. But never mind, Daisy, perhaps our wedding may bring about another; for if Henry Martin, when he sees me in my bridesmaid's dress, does not long to see me in that of a bride, my name isn't Aggie. He has been awfully sweet lately, I can tell you."

Mrs. Mortram's voice was now heard calling them down to tea, and, laughingly, Aggie placed the treasures she had been admiring on the bed, previous to their descending to the dining-room.

Bertram was there, having arrived two days previous at the Manor, and she thought how handsome he looked as he arose when she and Aggie entered the room.

It was a merry party which was assembled round the table, and, as Daisy opened a leather case, given her by her betrothed, an exclamation of admiration passed round as the diamond necklace it contained shone and sparkled in the lamplight.

"Oh, Bertie, you are too good," she said, as she lifted the sparkling gems from the velvet cushion on which they lay, and placed them on her rounded arm.

At that moment a servant entered.

"Please m'am," she said, addressing Mrs. Mortram, "Mrs. McKean has called to know if you would give a little new milk for the child, as it is the only thing he can take."

"Oh! my poor little Guy," said Daisy, as the necklace fell to the floor. "Mamma, dear, send him the milk, and say I will see him this evening," she continued, addressing the servant.

"Who is Guy?" asked Bertie, as he stooped to pick up the gems, which lay almost forgotten by the fair owner, in her anxiety for the suffering child.

"A protégé of my daughter's, Mr. Ravenswood," said Mr. Mortram, before Daisy could

reply to his question. "The child was brought here some six years since."

"Or rather, left here, papa, dear, you mean," said Daisy, as, turning to Bertie, she continued. "There is a romance in connection with little Guy, you must know. It was a bitter cold night just before Christmas, when a hamper was discovered, left, as it was supposed, by some passenger under the seat on the platform of our village terminus, but being without label or anything to denote its ownership; the porter who made the discovery was about to carry it to the stationmaster when he felt sure he heard the cry of an infant; nor was he mistaken, for, on opening the basket, a tiny face peered from beneath a lot of wraps, and on removing the latter a babe of about six weeks' old was discovered."

"A not uncommon occurrence, Daisy," said Bertie. "But did the porter keep the child?"

"He took it home to his old woman, as he called his wife, and she, having no child of her own, looked upon it as a gift from Heaven; and as she undressed it she found pinned to its clothes, which were of the finest texture, a strip of paper, begging that whoever should find him would give him a mother's care, the money placed amongst his linen would be the reward. There was everything necessary for the infant and one hundred pounds in Bank of England notes."

"Six years ago, you say; and was no clue ever found to the parentage of the child? It is strange."

The last words were spoken more to himself than to Daisy, who, rising from the table, asked him if he would accompany her to Mrs. McKan's.

The evenings were growing very chilly, but the cold was unheeded by Daisy, who nestled close to her lover's side, as he passed his arm lovingly around her slender waist.

"Dear, dear Daisy," he whispered, "you do not fear to trust your happiness with me, do you? Tell me, darling, you will never repeat the step you are about to take so soon, not even if in the past there should have been a secret which I cannot disclose?"

"What is it you mean, Bertie?" said the girl, as, in the growing darkness, she almost fell asleep at the strange tones of her lover's voice. "Is there anything very dreadful in your former life, that, did I know, would be likely to separate us?"

"Dreadful! No, Daisy, but in the days of my youth I thought another girl loved me, as you say you do; but she did not; she was false, and rumours were spread abroad reflecting on myself, but they were not true. Oh! Daisy, they were not true. Should such ever reach your ear, you will not believe them, darling? I was young then, and a fool," he continued, almost savagely, "but I never knew true love until I saw you. Oh! my pearl, my queen, say you will ever be true to me. I could not lose you, Daisy, it would kill me!"

The girl turned; in his excitement his voice had become hoarse and unnatural, bat as his eye looked into hers, even in the gloom, he could see the light of deep love which welled from their depths, and pressing her passionately to his bosom, whilst he impressed hot and burning kisses on her brow.

"Enough, darling," he said; "I am answer, I see. I know that you love me, that you will trust me, and I will ever love and cherish you to the end."

They had now reached the gate of the pretended abode of Mrs. McKan, and Bertie saying he would smoke a cigar whilst she went inside, he opened the same for her to pass through.

He watched her fragile figure as she glided down the gravel path. "Six years ago," he thought, as he heard the door open and close after her. "And why should such an idea enter my brain at this time? It is, it must be but a morbid fancy, and even if my suspicions should be well grounded, it cannot make any difference now."

Daisy entered the while the room where

little Guy lay on his sick bed, whilst Mrs. McKan watched over him.

"Is he better?" she asked, as she stooped to kiss the baby-face which looked so red in contrast to the snowy pillow on which he lay.

"Yes, miss," answered the woman. "It has come out fine (referring to the measles, from which complaint he was suffering), and if he does not catch cold he will be all right in a few days; but it was kind of you to come and see him to-night, when you are to be married in the morning."

"The very reason I did so," Mrs. McKan," said Daisy; "as I could not have left Sandfield without seeing Guy first."

The sound of his name seemed to awake the child from his slumber, and a gleam of pleasure came into his eyes as they fell on the form of Daisy.

"Oh, do kiss me," he said. "I'm so ill."

"Yes, darling, you are ill," said the girl, as she stooped to impress a kiss on the infant brow; "but be a good boy and take your medicine, and mother will soon have you well, and you will be able to gather holly and mistleto for Christmas."

"Will Christmas soon be here?" asked the child.

"Not just yet," said Daisy, "but you know you have to get strong before then, because I shall come to see you."

"Are you going away? Oh, don't go away," and the tears started to his eyes. "I don't like that big man mammy says is going to take you from Guy."

"Look here," said Mrs. McKan, as she took from the window-shelf beautiful bouquet of flowers to stay the tears which began to roll down his cheeks. "Show Miss Daisy what you have got for her."

"Oh, yes," said the boy, as he raised himself on his elbow. "Daddy brought these, cos I can't go to church and throw them down when you come out. Aren't they pretty? Smell them," he said, "smell them," as he pushed them under Daisy's nose.

"Oh, my darling, they are beautiful!" said the latter. "And are they for me?"

"Yes," said the little fellow, "they are, but I don't want to go to church and see all the things," and a sigh escaped the tiny breast.

"Never mind," said Daisy. "Look here, there is a real gold sovereign to put in your money-box instead," and disentangling herself from the baby arms which had clasped them selves around her neck, she impressed a fond kiss on his lips, and left him contemplating the brightness of the golden gift, as, after bidding Mrs. McKan good-night, she rejoined Bertie, who awaited her at the gate.

"Well, Daisy," he said, "and how is your little pet?"

"He is much better," was the reply. "But I am afraid I have kept you a long time. It is quite cold, is it not?" and she shivered as she drew her wrap round her.

The air was cold and sharp, and the sky looked stormy, thick clouds obscuring the moon, which had on the previous evening shone so bright and clear; and Daisy was not sorry when she reached her father's home, where, at the little gate, where so many a love tale had been told, she and Bertie parted for the last time as lovers.

The wind had changed during the night, and the mora was ushered in with a steady down-pour of rain, throwing a gloom over the bright faces of the bridesmaids, who held out to one another but a poor prospect for the happiness of the bride; Aggie declaring she would rather be buried than married on such a day.

And very lovely did Daisy look in her bridal robe of pearl satin, over which the Honiton lace veil, surmounted by a wreath of orange blossoms, fell like a fleecy cloud. The descending rain prevented her alighting until reaching the church porch instead of at the gate, as it was originally intended; but each side of the nave, down which she passed, to the altar, the school children were ranged, holding baskets of flowers, from which they threw their offerings at her feet, whilst poor

little Guy, who would so loved to have been present, was tossing on his bed, forgotten by all but her.

The bridegroom was already awaiting her coming, with Jack Blessington as groomsman. An unusual pallor overspread the features of the former, which seemed drawn and contracted, as if in mental pain; but as Daisy approached it gave way to a flush of excitement, whilst a look of pleasure and determination came into his dark eyes, and then the organ ceased, until after the ceremony, when it again poured forth in joyous strains, and the bells pealed merrily in the old church tower.

A faint ray of sunshine, the rain having now ceased, came out, as Daisy and Bertram entered the carriage which carried them to the Manor, where a sumptuous breakfast was provided, and numerous guests invited to the wedding feast; as, after the departure of the newly-married couple, Jack had arranged that in the evening a grand ball should be given in honour of the occasion.

The dreariness of the outdoor prospect (that one ray of sunshine being all to be seen for the rest of the day), did not seem to damp the spirits of the assembled guests, Mrs. Mortram alone looking sad, at the thought of parting with her daughter, from whom until now she had never been separated for a single day, but the happy look on the face of the latter even made her forget her grief; and as she pressed her to her bosom for a final farewell before she entered the carriage which was to bear her and Bertie away, she appeared to be happy in her happiness, and was ready as the others to raise a shower of slippers and rice, as the wheels turned on the gravel drive.

Arrived at the railway station, Daisy entered the waiting room, the train for London not being due for ten minutes, and Bertram was about to leave her to see to the luggage, when a porter carrying a child enveloped in wraps entered the room.

"Excuse me, Miss Daisy, Mrs. Ravensworth, I mean," he said, "but I was obliged to bring him to bid you good bye, I thought he'd have cried himself into a fit."

"Do kiss me again," said the child, as, sobbing and struggling to free himself from the shawls Mrs. McKan had put round him, he threw his arms round Daisy's neck.

"This is very naughty," said Daisy, "and daddy was naughty too, to bring you out, and on such a day."

"Well 'm," said McKan, who looked very nervous at what might be the consequence of giving way to Guy. "What could I do? He did plead so hard, and the missus wrapped him up, so that I don't think much harm can be done."

"You will come back to Guy, won't you?" the little fellow pleaded, as McKan, saying the train would be in in a minute or two, once more took him from her arms, and drew the wraps around as Bertram entered.

"What is this, Daisy?" he asked. "Only little Gay, darling, come to bid me good-bye," she answered.

"Oh! your little protégé, I see," was the reply, but as he turned to where the porter with the boy in his arms was about to leave he started visibly, but with an effort controlled himself, as Daisy asked what was the matter.

"The matter, dear, nothing but a striking resemblance," he replied, as the bell rang to announce the approaching train, and he led his bride to the carriage.

CHAPTER III.

DOROTHY.

It was late before they arrived at their destination, and the rain came down in torrents, as they emerged from the station-yard.

"What a night it is, my pet," said Bertie, as he pulled down the glass of the hansom, and gave directions to the cabby where he was

to drive to, which, as it had been decided between him and Daisy that their honeymoon should be spent at their own home, was St.—Lane.

"Yes, it is not very lively, is it?" said the latter, as she looked out on the pedestrians, as with umbrellas coming in contact with each other, when they were not blown inside out by the wind, they each portrayed a picture of discomfort and misery.

"And this is London!" said Daisy, "the grand city of which I have heard so much;" and she gave a little scream, as she felt they would be run over by another cab, which appeared to her too close to their own to be able to pass in safety, much to the amusement of Bertie, who told her it was all right—a hairbreadth was enough for a Londoner. But at last, much to her relief, they arrived safely, as the old church clock chimed the hour. It was eight o'clock, and very dark and gloomy looked the long passage which led to the entrance door belonging to the old house, her new home, which was so built within others as to leave nothing visible from its windows but those belonging to its neighbours, but it was true.

Bertram had done all that was possible to make it bright and cheery. Notwithstanding the intensity of the season, still flowers were placed in every available space, so as to give beauty and colouring to its surroundings. A cheerful fire was burning in the grate of the room, to which he led his bride. Its warm glow reflected on the bright steel fender and fire irons, and adding much to the comfort of a little terrier, who, until he heard his master's voice, had been fully enjoying the comfort derived therefrom. The velvet furniture was of a rich ruby shade, the pile carpet being of the same hue, whilst a large mat of fleecy whiteness took the place of a hearthrug.

A delicate and refined taste was visible in all the surroundings—from the rich curtains, with their soft bordering of lace, to each ornament and painting which adorned the room.

Dorothy, the housekeeper, was superb in spotless white apron and stiff muslin cap, with handkerchief, the latter passing over the shoulders, and crossing her bosom; and as she dropped an ancient curtsey her wrinkled countenance was stern and precise. In striking contrast a young girl came nimbly forward to assist Daisy in taking off her wraps. Bertie insisting she should not trouble to go upstairs until she had had some refreshment; and as she turned from the old woman to the sunny face of the little waiting-maid she felt so grateful to her husband that he had not assigned to the former the duties of personal attendant on herself.

"And what does my darling think of her new home?" asked Bertie, as, after having partaken of a slight repast, Daisy looked around the room between the caresses she was bestowing on Chip, who was as pleased to see her as though they had been friends from his puppyhood.

"Oh, it is charming!" she said, glancing round the room, "but—" and she hesitated.

"But what?" said her husband.

"That old woman seems to chill it all. She looks to me like an ancient picture escaped from its frame, and she looked so stern at me. Bertie, I felt quite frightened."

"You silly child!" said Bertie, as he drew her towards him, proceeding of which Chip did not approve. "Poor old Dorothy! Like old china, I prize her, Daisy, not only for her worth, but she has been so long in the family that she is as a part and portion of the same, and all now that is left to speak to me of the past. She was my mother's nurse, she was mine, and whilst I live Dorothy must eat of my bread, and share the shelter of my roof."

He looked so strange that Daisy almost regretted the words she had uttered, when a slight noise, so slight as to be almost inaudible, caused her to raise her head from her husband's shoulder, as he arose and went to the door.

"Shall Phoebe attend Mrs. Ravensworth to her chamber before going to bed?"

It was Dorothy's voice, and Daisy wondered if she should have heard her remarks respecting herself, but as the old woman at Bertie's command entered the room there was not a sign on her countenance that a word had reached her ears.

"Tell Phoebe I am quite ready," said Daisy; and telling Bertie she was very tired, she told the girl, who had obeyed her summons, to lead the way to her bedroom.

"Oh, what a strange old place this must be!" thought the young wife, as following Phoebe up the wide staircase, with its wide, old-fashioned hand rail, to the second landing, through a long corridor, for which there appeared no use, she arrived at the sleeping apartment which was hers and her husband's, which, like the sitting-room, was fitted up with the greatest elegance and taste.

A fire there also burnt cheerful and bright, and long after Phoebe had unloosed her golden tresses, and performed all that was necessary for her young mistress, did the latter remain gazing into the burning coals, her heart overbrimming with love for the man who had that day made her his wife, and who had surrounded her with all to make her life happy.

One quarter, twenty minutes, half-an-hour must have passed and still she sat happily dreaming, until approaching footsteps assured her that her husband was about to join her, and she arose with the intention of retiring to rest, when she thought she could hear whispering in the long corridor through which she had passed.

Noisily opening the door, which she had now approached, so as not to be mistaken, she peered out.

There stood Bertie and the old housekeeper in close conversation, on which they were so intent that Daisy's movements were quite unnoticed, but it was carried on in so low a tone that, strain her ears as she would, she could not detect a word, and was about to glide from her uncomfortable position when Bertie, apparently forgetting his former caution, spoke so far above his breath as for her to hear him ask Dorothy what she thought of his new wife.

"She is beautiful," was the reply, "and no doubt good, if looks do not belie her, but you should not have brought her here;" and then the old woman, who, like Bertram, had forgotten her former caution, suddenly remembering herself, fell again into a whisper, and further than "folly" Daisy could hear no more.

And when Bertie entered his wife's room he thought the childish face which rested on the snowy pillow was enwrapped in a sweet slumber, little dreaming how long, long into the silent hours the little troubled breast was weighing within itself the strange occurrence of the evening.

"Why should she not be there?" she asked herself. "And why should Dorothy place such a stress on the preposition? but perhaps after all, it was only fancy. Maybe the old woman thought, after the pure air of her country home, the close atmosphere of this London house would not be beneficial to her health; but why should the whisper, and, above all, why should Bertie ask how she liked his new wife? Had he ever had another?" And thus question after question presented itself to her imagination, until at last, worn-out by the day's excitement, sleep came to her relief, and only in her dreams did she revert to the events which had conjured up in her mind a strange misgiving.

The morning broke bright and clear, a sharp wind having removed all traces of the mud of the previous day, and so new to Daisy was this London life that she forgot the circumstances which had troubled her mind, in the novelty surrounding her. Anxious to explore her new home, Bertie showed her the upper portion, whilst Dorothy led her through the offices, thus giving over to her new mistress the reins of government; but it was not without a feeling of jealousy that she, who had so

long reigned supreme in the household arrangements, held to Daisy the basket of keys which before had never left her custody, to which the latter was not blind, as handing them back to the old woman she said,

"I think things had better remain as they are. I am very young, and know little of house-keeping, Dorothy; whilst you have acted in that capacity so long to Mr. Ravensworth, that doubtless you will prove the best manageress."

It was a good stroke on the part of Daisy. The hardened features of the old woman relaxed, and her heart seemed to warm to the young wife, whom before she had looked upon as an interloper.

"Just as you please, ma'am," she replied, "I have always acted for the best, and I think Mr. Ravensworth has been satisfied."

"I am quite sure he has, Dorothy," replied Daisy, "for he speaks of you in the highest terms."

A smile fitted over the ancient countenance, it was all.

"What a queer old house it is," continued Daisy, "and where does this lead to?" she asked, as she pushed what appeared to be a door on one side of the kitchen.

Dorothy was at her side in a moment. "Tono—where," she said, in a frightened tone. "I can't tell. It has been closed, nailed, fastened up for years; in fact, I don't believe it to be a door at all."

The strange tone of her voice, the quick, disjointed words made Daisy wonder, and she was about to ask further respecting the same when Dorothy said that Mr. Ravensworth was calling her; so without another question she left her to ascend to the sitting-room, where Bertie sat in an easy chair, engrossed in the perusal of the morning paper.

"Did you call, Bertie?" she asked.

"No dear," was the reply, as he put it aside.

"How odd!" thought Daisy. "Did Dorothy really think she heard him, or was it a subterfuge together from the kitchen, and thus stay any further questioning?" but her husband entering into the programme he had laid out for the day's and evening's amusement, sent Dorothy and her mysterious ways from the girl's head, as she coincided fully with the arrangements he had made.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CLOSED DOOR.

Two months had passed since Bertie brought his bride home. The honeymoon was at an end, and Daisy had fallen into the ways of the everyday life she brightened with her presence as though she had spent two years, instead of a short two months, beneath his roof; and even Dorothy could not but acknowledge how her bright face and joyous voice dispelled the gloom which had formerly pervaded the house.

"And so you come from Norfolk," said the latter one day, as Daisy was speaking to her of her childhood's home. I am a Norfolk woman, too, but it is a long time now since I visited any of my people, and most of them I ever knew or cared for are dead and gone. But I remember well Sandfield Manor, though it wasn't Mr. Blessington as had it in my time. Well, it do seem strange we should both come from the same place."

"Then, of course, you know the Rookery, my father's house," said Daisy, whose aversion towards Dorothy seemed to have given way considerably during the last few weeks, and to whom she seemed even to warm, as she discovered the same village had been the birthplace of both; but the immense lapse of time quite prevented Dorothy being acquainted with the inhabitants, although the old places, in other respects, recalled themselves to her mind, which to Daisy lost much of the interest which she otherwise would have derived from the conversation.

"But the McKans'?" Oh, yes, she knew them

well, at least the old people; and many a time she had, carried their son Tom in her arms, but there, she had, supposed as how he was married and had children of his own now!"

"Tom McKan," replied Daisy; "why, yes, he had been married years. He was porter at the railway station, and until six years ago he and his wife had no children; but one night just before Christmas, '77, a child was left on the platform."

"Hush!" and Dorothy who was standing by the open door of the sitting-room—where Daisy was seated by the fire—gently closed the same.

"What is it?" asked the latter, thus disturbed in her narrative.

"Oh, nothing," replied the woman. "Only I thought I heard the master's step. Go on, Mrs. Ravensworth; you said a child was left on the platform. Did Tom find it? Did they, his wife and him I mean, keep it? Tell me is it alive now, is it alive now?"

Daisy turned. Dorothy in her excitement had come near to where she sat, her every feature quivering with the intensity of her feelings; but as she saw the astonishment with which the former regarded her it recalled her to herself, as with a strong effort she strove to hide the effects of her emotion; and under the pretext that the fire was burning low she stooped to replenish the same. When she arose there was not a trace of anything unusual in her countenance.

"And so, I suppose, the McKans adopted the little foundling?" she asked. It was not the Dorothy of the last few moments, it was the same stiff, stern Dorothy of old who now asked the question, and Daisy looked at her in wonder, as she noted the sudden change in her manner.

"This strange piece of antiquity," she thought to herself. "What could it all mean? That there was a history in connection with her life she felt assured, that ever and anon threw such a veil of mystery over her whole proceedings.

"They did," she replied, but the sound of her husband's approaching footsteps prevented her saying further; and as Dorothy left the room she felt assured she heard her murmur, "Thank Heaven!" as the door closed behind her; but Daisy banished from her thoughts the odd behaviour of this extraordinary woman, which she now almost had begun to look upon as eccentricity, perhaps owing to her great age, and she was glad when the bright, little housemaid entered bearing the dinner.

She did not tell Bertie what had happened, as she felt sure he would, as on former occasions, only laugh at what he called her fancies, and show the slightest shade of annoyance should she mention anything that threw a doubt on the sincerity of the old woman; and as Phoebe was the only one she could speak to; confidences were exchanged relative to the matter at times when that young person was engaged in her mistress's toilet.

To say that Daisy was not happy would be wrong. She was devoted to her husband, who equally returned the affection she bestowed; but at times a feeling of distrust came over her, and she had even made up her mind to beg of him to tell her that story of the past which he had withheld from her; but when the time came her lips were sealed—he so gentle, so thoughtful of her every wish—she would not suffer him to think that she mistrusted him, and so the weeks past.

It was agreed that Christmas should be spent with the old folks, and as it drew near it was with a childish feeling of delight that Daisy looked forward to the same. The days had grown short and foggy, and every sign of the festive season was at hand.

"See, dear," said Daisy, one morning, as she placed an open letter before her husband, "we are expected on the 22nd. Will that do?" and leaning over his chair she kissed his forehead.

"Will what do?—the kiss?" he asked. "No, I should like another."

"No," she replied, laughing. "You know I don't mean that. I mean the date for visiting home!"

"Yes, pet!" he said, as after reading the letter he returned it to her. "I'm agreeable."

And so it was arranged that they should leave town on the 22nd; and although really there was nothing that Daisy required for her journey, still a great load of shopping seemed suddenly to have fallen on her shoulders as she daily dived from one store into another, purchasing presents and articles for her own use on this her first visit home since she had left it as a bride.

It was but the day previous to their intended journey that she had returned from one of these expeditions, and having let herself in with the key, entered the sitting-room, where, on the table, she placed her many purchases before descending to the kitchen, where she expected to find Dorothy, but neither she nor Phoebe were to be seen, and the bright fire and spotless white hearth looked so inviting that Daisy threw off her hat, and, taking a chair, placed her feet on the fender to await her coming.

How long she remained there she scarcely knew, as she never cast a glance at the clock, which solemnly ticked on in the corner, as in deep thought she sat enjoying the heat of the cheerful fire, but as she heard the girl's step on the stairs above she was about to rise to let her know she had returned, when a moan, as of someone in pain, fell on her ear, arising, as it were, from the floor beneath her.

She started to her feet, and motioning to Phoebe, who now came in sight, to be quiet, told her of what had occurred, but although both listened intently to catch the least sound, it was not repeated.

Dorothy soon followed, and seem surprised to see her mistress had returned.

"Why, what's the matter, ma'am? You look scared!"

"I was frightened," she said. "For as I sat here I thought I heard a groan as of someone in pain."

"Lor! what an idea!" said the old woman, she laughed, as Daisy thought, a harsh, unnatural laugh. "Why, if you mean it comes through the boards that's nothing unusual, for the wind will at this time of the year moan and make one fancy all sorts of things. But come up, Mrs. Ravensworth; it is time you had a change if you get such ideas as that into your head."

And Daisy agreeing that to leave London for a time would be beneficial to her health, as she thought she must be getting nervous, ascended to her room, where, with Phoebe's assistance, the task of packing was completed.

"Oh, ma'am," said the girl, as she knelt beside a large trunk, "I can't make it out, but when I have been in the kitchen I have often heard a kind of groaning like, but so faint; and do you know, ma'am, I'd give the world to open that door by the fireplace!"

"Well, Phoebe," Daisy replied, "as you have not the world to give it does not much matter, and if you had, I doubt if you would find anything to repay you for such a sacrifice by opening a door which has been closed, maybe, a century."

"Yes, a century, so Dorothy says," said Phoebe, as she endeavoured to close the trunk with about double in it than it was constructed to carry. "Well, ma'am, if that door hasn't been opened within the last week, may I never eat apple-pie again!"

Apple-pie was Phoebe's favourite dish, and unless very certain on a point, she would never have risked the loss of such a dainty; thus Daisy being aware of her weakness, felt sure she had some good reason for making such an affirmation.

"Why should you say so?" she asked.

"Why, ma'am," was the reply, "it was late at night, about a week ago—you and the master had gone to bed, and so had I, leaving

Dorothy behind, as she said she would look to the fastening of the doors—but just as I had undressed, I remembered I had left a pair of stockings I had been mending for the morning on the dresser, and went down again without my shoes to fetch them, when fancy my surprise to see her standing by that door—she had just closed it behind her!"

"What did she say?" asked Daisy.

"She said nothing for a moment, but her face turned as white as a sheet, and then she asked what I meant by creeping about the house like a cat; and the strangest part of it is that when I examined the door, as you may be sure I well did next day, I could not find a sign of lock or fastening to confirm what I had seen."

"I will ask Dorothy myself about it," said Daisy, "and if she does not choose to explain I will ask Mr. Ravensworth."

"Oh, please don't, ma'am!" pleaded the girl, "for if she thought I had said a word about it she would kill me—I know she would; but leave it to me, and I will find out what it means, if I burst it open myself."

"Hush! Didn't you hear that? It was a s'igh, as if from some one without."

But when Phoebe arose from the kneeling posture she had assumed during the packing to open the door there was no one there.

"I could have sworn some one was listening," she said, as she returned to her mistress, who now stood pale and terrified in the middle of the room; "but, lor, ma'am, don't look so frightened. The master'll wonder what it is."

"I feel quite nervous," was the reply; but as Bertram's voice was heard downstairs Daisy recovered herself with a strong effort, and, leaving Phoebe to finish her packing, descended to the sitting room.

They were to leave by the early train for Sandfield, and, pleading fatigue, Daisy told her husband she should not stay up late that night, so retired about ten o'clock.

"What could it all mean?" she said to herself, as she recalled to her mind Dorothy's mysterious ways, which until that evening she had almost forgotten, but which then were brought fresh to her memory the strange words she had heard pass between her and her husband on the first night of her arrival in the corridor leading to her room.

CHAPTER V.

LITTLE GUY.

"We shall have a white Christmas, after all," said Bertram, as he looked out on the falling snow, which had enveloped each household in a spotless mantle.

"I am so glad," replied Daisy. "It will seem so like old times to see my father's place again, each tree laden with snow, the icy pendants shining like diamonds in the sunlight, and the dear old bells ringing out their Christmas chimes in the frosty air."

"Only a short two months, Daisy," said her husband, "and you seem as glad to get back to the old place as though it had been two years of misery spent from them."

"Oh, don't talk like that!" she replied, as, throwing her arms round his neck, she smothered his face with her kisses. "It is not that—you know it is not that; but—"

"But what, Daisy?" he asked.

"Oh, Bertie, you know how I love you! and for the world I would not even ask a question that I thought would give you pain; but do tell me what it is that makes you—makes Dorothy—makes all about this house mysterious?"

"I was not aware of any mystery in connection with it or me," he replied. "You have got some fancies into your little head. There, don't be foolish!" and he pressed a kiss on the fair white forehead. "Put aside all such silly ideas; and it is time we were off. Look at the time! The train starts at 10.30."

He turned to the timepiece, and Daisy, for

getting all but that they had not a moment to spare, ran to the door.

"Oh, Dorothy!" she said, "how you frightened me!" for as she was about to open it the handle turned from without, and the housekeeper entered the room.

"I thought you did not know how late it was, ma'am," she said, whilst she looked at Bertram, who, with his hands behind him, stood on the hearth-rug.

An hour later, and Daisy, with her husband, were steaming towards her childhood's home, each moment taking her further from London and its ceaseless din; and, ensconced in a warm corner of the carriage they occupied, with travelling-rugs wrapped around her, she half dozingly watched the beauty of the snowy landscape, nor took much heed of the other passengers, until a gentleman, who had been awaiting the arrival of the train at —— station, entered their compartment.

"Hallo, Jack," said Bertram, as the former, after stowing away a portmanteau under the seat, and a hat-box, umbrellas, &c., in the rack overhead, recognised his fellow-passengers.

"Hallo, old fellow. Well, this is fortunate; who would have thought of our meeting here? How do you do, Mrs. Ravensworth?" he continued, as he held out his hand to Daisy.

"Won't you come and have some refreshment? They wait here ten minutes to take in water."

"I would rather not, thank you," she replied. "The truth is, I have just got warm, and do not care to move, but you go, Bertie."

They were not long, the time had almost expired when they returned to the carriage, bringing a hot glass of brandy-and-water for Daisy.

"Drink it up, Daisy," said Bertram; "it will warm you, but you must make haste, for the train is just starting."

"Well, unless I am to burn my throat, or return it undrank, I must keep the glass," Daisy replied.

"All right, Mrs. Ravensworth; never mind about the glass," said Jack; "we can return it at the next station. Jump in, Bert," which the latter had but just time to do, as, with a shriek and a snort, the train again moved forward.

"And how do you like London?" asked Jack of Daisy, who sipped the brandy-and-water, which, by the motion of the train, was mostly spilled over her wraps.

"Oh, very well," she replied, "but you should see our house. I think it must be the strangest in town, and I am sure Bertie will be as pleased as myself that you should, if you would, favour us with a visit, that you may judge of it for yourself."

"Thank you," said Jack, "I shall be most happy some day to visit you, but as I have stayed with Bertie his bachelor days I know a little about it;" and he wondered to himself if Daisy had found it as mysterious as he had done, but Bertie telling them to collect their traps, as the next station would be —— where they would have to change for Sandfield, the subject dropped.

"By-the-by, Mrs. Ravensworth," said Jack, "there is one in our village who will be delighted to see you, above all others—poor little Guy; he has never been well since you left. I saw Tom, his face as long as a fiddle, the other day, when I was waiting for the train to take me to ——, where we met this afternoon, and he told me about the boy, of whom he seems desperately fond."

The train came to a standstill, and, a collector entering for tickets, further conversation was at an end, until a few moments later, when they alighted at their destination.

Jack and Daisy remained, waiting the return of Bertie, who had gone to the rear in search of the luggage.

"Is Guy really very ill, Mr. Blessington?" asked Daisy.

"I believe so," was the reply. "Tom told me he foolishly gave way to the child, and brought him to the station to bid you good-bye, when ——"

"I know he did," interrupted Daisy; "poor little fellow."

"Well, he went back to bed, and, I believe, was very near never coming out of it."

Bertie was now seen returning, followed by a porter with the trunks.

Mr. Mortram was there with his trap, when they arrived half-an-hour later at Sandfield, and after the greetings between father and daughter had passed, the latter stepped aside to ask McKan, when he had finished closing the doors of the passing train, how her little protege was.

"I'm afraid he ain't long for this world," said Tom, as he drew the back of his hand across his eyes, "but who would a thought he'd a caught cold through all those wraps I put over him?"

"I thought than it was wrong to bring him out," said Daisy.

"Oh! please miss.—mum I mean," said the poor fellow, don't you go for to blame me; my missus is alius a 'throwin' it in my teeth, and I'd give all I have to see him well, that I would."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Ravensworth," said Jack now approaching, "I hope I shall have the pleasure of your company, although I am a bachelor, and Sandfield Manor is not much of a ladies' resort;" and raising his hat, as Daisy graciously accepted the invitation, he drove off, as Mr. Mortram told Daisy and her husband to follow him to where the trap was in readiness. Mrs. Mortram was delighted to see her daughter, and the first few days of Daisy's visit were occupied in visiting old friends. The snow lay white and deep on the frosty ground, but it was fine overhead, and where it had become trodden underfoot it was firm and dry. Aggie's prediction had been fulfilled; the bridesmaid's dress which had been so becoming had won for her the bridal veil, as six weeks after Daisy's wedding she became Mrs. Martin.

It was the day preceding Christmas. Mrs. Mortram was fully occupied in the manufacture of such good things, as seem by all Christians to be necessary adjuncts of that most joyous of festivals, when Daisy asked her husband if he would accompany her for a walk.

"It will be no nice, dear," she said, "to go

around the old spots where a few weeks ago,

we used to walk on the green, and see them all

covered with snow, the tiny river no longer

rippling on its way, but stayed by one massive

sheet of ice which comes up to where the

rushes before waved at our feet."

"Why, Daisy, you are getting quite romantic," said Bertie, as he gazed down lovingly at the upturned face, which the frosty air had

mantled with a roseate blush; "but come along,

it is rather too cold to stand and descant on

the beauties of nature, and a cough and a cold

may be the result."

"All right," she laughed, "one half mile

more and we will return, but, before doing so,

I should like to hear how Guy is."

It was getting rather late when they entered

the gate leading to Mrs. McKan's cottage, and,

as the snow commenced falling, Daisy per-

suaded her husband to go into the house with

her.

She had seen the child several times since her visit to Sandfield, but was not prepared to see him so changed as he was on this occasion.

Instead of being seated by the fire in his usual place he was in bed, his face scarce less white than the pillow on which his head, with its

auburn curls rested; he was in a deep sleep,

and the dark fringes of his closed eyelids lay

damp and thick on his marble cheek.

"Has he been crying?" asked Daisy of Mrs. McKan, in a low tone, as she noted the tears on the boy's lashes.

"Yes, m—" said the woman, scarcely able to restrain her emotion, as she bade her companions listen to his hard breathing. "He fretted cos you hadn't been for to see him since yester-morn, and he says he wants to bid you good-bye."

"Good-bye! Why, what does he mean?" asked Daisy."

"Ah! poor lamb, he knows he's a goin'; the doctor says there's no hope," said Mrs. McKan almost broke down again; but seeing Bertram, whom before she had not noticed, she brought forward a chair for his use, but it was unheeded. With his arms crossed over his breast, just behind where Daisy was seated by the child's cot, Bertie stood, seemingly unnoticed, his gaze riveted on the sleeping boy, whose painful breathing resounded through the apartment, until, with a heavy sigh, almost a groan, he turned from the scene, and looking at his watch told Daisy it was time to return.

The snow was fast falling, as, with their thoughts fixed on the suffering boy, they retraced their steps to Mr. Mortram's. A true old English Christmas it was, pleasant to all but those whose slender means debarred them from that which was necessary to stand against the biting cold; but there were not happily, many in Sandfield who were thus situated.

The lord of the manor was most liberal in his gifts of blankets, coals, &c., to the deserving poor, and when the village bells rang out the merry Yuletide peal there were few whose joyous hearts did not respond to that Yuletide greeting.

But there was a grim visitor in the McKans' home which no money could keep away; and as each peal of the village chimes resounded in the distance it sounded as a death-knell to the ears of the watcher by the boy's bedside.

"Well, is he better, mother?" asked Tom, as he now entered, and, shaking the snow from his cap and coat, advanced to where the child lay.

The sound of his voice seemed to awake the latter, who, turning uneasily, opened his eyes to look into the face of the man he believed to be his father.

"Isn't Christmas come, father?" he asked.

"Yes, my boy. Why?" asked Tom.

"Because I thought I heard the bells, and I am so glad I heard them before I went. Will they ring when I am there, father?" and he pointed upwards.

"Don't talk like that, boy. You are not going away to leave mother and me; you are going to get well," said Tom, in a choking voice.

"No, I shall never be well again till I am with Jesus, and when I am an angel I shall play on a harp, as teacher says angels do. Oh, mummy, I'm so cold; cuddle me close, and tell me of Jesus. Will he love Guy as you and father do?"

"He will, he does love you," said Mrs. McKan, as pressing the child close to her bosom she could not restrain the tears which showered down on the infant head.

"Why do you cry, mummy?" he asked.

"Does your head ache, too? Oh! my head does ache—ache so much, and in Heaven, you know, it won't ache any more. Oh, when will Jesus take little Guy?"

"Do you want to leave me, my darling—my darling?" and the woman smothered him with kisses, whilst her sobs re-echoed through the apartment.

"Hush, mother! Don't give way like that," said Tom, as he placed his hand on his wife's shoulder. "It only makes him worse."

"Hark!" said the boy, as the sound of voices singing without fell on his ears.

"It is only the waits, my child," said Tom.

"Yes, Daddy, I know," and raising his head from his foster-mother's shoulder a sudden brightness came over his face as the hymn song recurred to his memory, and clasping his hands, he joined in.

"Cold o'er his cradle the dewdrops are shining.

Low lies his head with the beasts of the stall,

Angels adore him in slumber reclining,

Our Prince, and our King, and Saviour in all."

His strength failing he could sing no more; but laying back, he listened to those without, as beneath a clear, frosty sky they sang to the end the carol the dying boy had learnt at Sunday-school.

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Scarcely had the last note died away than a gentle knock caused them to start. It wanted but a few minutes to twelve o'clock, and as Tom opened the door his surprise was great at seeing Mr. Ravensworth on the threshold; but without waiting to ask the reason of his visit he bade him enter his humble dwelling.

Mrs. McKan, laying the child's head on the pillow, arose as he entered the room, and dropping a low curtsey, asked him to be seated.

"I am afraid I frightened you at this hour, Mrs. McKan," he said, "but Daisy—Mrs. Ravensworth—was so anxious about her little pet that I promised to come over, and bring him this as a present from Santa Claus," and he put into her hand a handsomely-bound volume of fairy tales.

The boy looked up for a moment, but the book seemed to give him little pleasure, and laying it down on the coverlid, he took no notice further than to fix his eyes on Bertie.

"Don't you like the pretty book, Guy?" asked the latter, as, taking it up, he began to show the boy the different pictures.

"He's too far gone for them now, sir," said Mrs. McKan, as the child lay in a dreamy, half-unconscious state, with his eyes still resting on Bertie, "and there they are," she said. "That's what he's been waiting for, for the boy raised his finger as if to invoke silence, as the sound of the Christmas chimes burst on their ears.

"Mrs. McKan," said Bertie, as, rising from his chair, he asked the former if he could speak to her a moment away from Guy's bed. Where did you get that child? Mrs. Ravensworth has told me something about his having been left when an infant."

"That's true, sir," said the woman, before he had time to finish the sentence, and then she told him how that time six years ago he had been brought by her husband to her arms.

"And you have no clue at all to his parentage?" he asked.

"None whatever. All that was in the hamper with him was a strip of paper, begging any who might find him to take care of him, and treat him kindly, and a sum of money for their trouble," she replied.

"I suppose you destroyed that paper?" said Bertie.

"No, sir, I didn't; leastways, Tom didn't, for, says he, 'Old woman, one never knows what might come of it.'

Guy had now, whilst listening to the bells, fallen into a quiet sleep, and as Tom heard his name mentioned he arose from the child's bedside and advanced to the fireplace, where Bertie and his wife were standing, when the latter asked him to show the gentleman the strip of paper found in the hamper.

Taking a small key from his pocket he went to the corner of the room, where, on a table, with the family Bible on the top of it, stood an old-fashioned writing desk. This he unhooked, and brought from amidat many papers, yellow with age, the paper he required.

It was half a sheet of writing-paper with a monogram, F.R., on the top. The penmanship was that of an uneducated hand. It had broken at the folds by being kept in the porter's pocket some time before he placed it in the general receptacle of special family papers; the writing had become faint and discoloured, but Bertie's eyes were fixed on the simple words, a strange fascination attracting him towards the monogram at the top.

At last, as he saw that Tom and his wife were regarding him curiously, he folded the paper, and asking the former if he would allow him to retain it for a time, was about to put it in his pocket.

For a moment the porter hesitated, but as the child awoke with a fit of coughing he gave way; and it was not long before Bertie, with a strange look at the dying boy, took his leave.

Beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, notwithstanding the bitter cold of the winter night, and he walked as though he cared not where so that it was away from his thoughts, away from the shadow which for ever haunted

his footsteps, whilst the tiny life of little Guy was ebbing away slowly and surely in his cottage home.

"Mummy," he said, as after the coughing had ceased he fell back on his pillow, "is the gen'l'man gone?"

"Yes, darling, why?" she asked.

"Because I'm so glad; I want only you and daddy to be with me, when Jesus comes; kiss me daddy, kiss me mummy, I's so tired, so tired," and the little weary eyes closed, as Mrs. McKan's and her husband's sobs re-echoed through the room.

Long, long they watched in that room so still, save for Guy's heavy breathing, which with the early hours became fainter and fainter, as the little lips but once more unclosed; and "Our Father" was all that could be heard, as they moved in silent prayer, and when the morning sun entered into the porter's home he cast his rays on the chamber of death—little Guy had passed away.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRISONER.

ILL news travels apace, and it was as Daisy awoke, whilst the village bell rang in the glad tidings of peace and good-will, that the sad news of little Guy's death was brought to her, which cast a gloom for her over all the preparations which were being made for the joyous season. Poor little Guy! How many a time had he thrown his arms around her neck, pressing his baby face to hers, as she would tell him stories of little ones who had gone before to that land to which he was so early called, a poor little waif without kin or kin, never knowing the parents who maybe consigned him to the mercies of a cruel and heartless world, or others more cruel, who had torn him from a mother's arms, out of revenge for a fancied wrong.

And Bertram also seemed dull and depressed, so much so that he proposed that they should return to town at an earlier date than they had intended.

"Doubtless, dear," he said to Daisy, as they returned the day after Christmas, from the cottage where they had been to see the boy in his last narrow bed, "you would like to stay until after the funeral, or will you go to-morrow? I have a case coming on which will necessitate my return by the third of January."

"I should like to remain until the earth falls over my little pet," she replied; "but I do not care to stay longer, and I wish you would make the excuse, at the same time, saying how much we regret not being able to attend the ball Mr. Blessington is to give in our honour. I am very sorry, Bertie, but I do not think I could enjoy a dance now, and yet it seems strange that this child's life or death should so influence my feelings, but I cannot help it. It seems something more than I can understand. However, I will write to Dorothy to-day, and tell her of the change in our plans."

"Yes, write to Dorothy." Bertie replied, in an abstracted tone, as with his walking-stick he knocked the snow from his path.

And that afternoon Daisy wrote to the old housekeeper, telling her they should be home that day week, and then she told her of the death of her little protégé, Tom's adopted boy, of whom she had spoken to her before.

Mr. and Mrs. Mottram were much disappointed at their being obliged to curtail their visit, whilst Jack tried every inducement to get them to prolong it; and Aggie declared she never set her heart on anything in her life but she was sure to be disappointed, and on this occasion it was heart-breaking, when she had arranged such a nice little supper and carpet dance, that she felt almost cross with poor little Guy for dying just at that time, as she felt sure that had something to do with Daisy's early return, notwithstanding her assertion to the contrary.

It was the day preceding the funeral, and

Daisy had walked over to the McKans to take a last look at the dead boy before he was shut out from the world for ever.

The coffin rested on trestles in one corner of the room, and was now covered with a black pall; and as Daisy approached she was astonished to see lying on the same a magnificent cross, formed of the choicest flowers, with the initials G. R. in the centre.

"Where did this come from, Mrs. McKan?—from the Manor?" asked Daisy, as the thought that Jack might have sent it occurred to her mind. But then the initials—what did they mean?"

"Well, that's more than I can tell, ma'am," said Mrs. McKan. "It came from London this morning in a box addressed to Tom, with a few words wishing it to be placed on the child's coffin; and the strangest part of the story is, I feel sure that the wrisin' is the same as that we had six years ago. But how anyone there could know he was dead gets over me; and the letters—well, there, I can't make it out. But I should just like you to see if them two writin's ain't alike!" and Mrs. McKan removed the family Bible off the old-fashioned desk, as her husband had done a few evenings previous, when she remembered he had the key.

"Of course," said the woman, "Tom had it the other night when Mr. Ravensworth was here."

"Mr. Ravensworth!" said Daisy. "Was he here?"

"Yes, 'm. Didn't you know it? He was here the night he died," and she pointed to the coffin.

"How strange," thought Daisy. What could have taken Bertie to the porter's cottage that he should have gone without her knowledge?

But as Mrs. McKan removed the cross and pall so that she could, for the last time, gaze on the child's features, all but his loss vanished from her mind, and she forgot the strange circumstance connected with the existence of the little being to whom now she knew she was so deeply attached, as her tears fell fast on the marble face.

It was getting dark ere she retraced her steps to the Rookery, but the marks her recent emotion had left on her countenance restrained all comments as to where she had been.

The frost of the last few weeks was that night followed by a rapid thaw, which left the ground one mass of mush, as the rain descended on the mourners wending their way to the village church, in the graveyard of which little Guy was sleeping his last long sleep; but the echo of his death knell was heard all over the little hamlet, as with "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes," he was lowered into the cold grave prepared for him; and the next day Bertram and Daisy left Sandfield for London.

Dorothy was ready to receive them, spotless in snowy cambric of cap and kerchief, as they drove up to St. — Lane, Phoebe standing a little way behind with a smile of welcome, of genuine delight, at the return of her mistress, as she came up the long entrance leading to the hall door, whilst nothing could restrain the joy of Chig, as barking and turning sundry pirouettes, he, as far as possible, impeded that mistress's progress.

"All had been going on right," was Dorothy's reply to her master's questions respecting the house during their absence, "and she hoped that he and the mistress had enjoyed themselves, and that Mrs. Ravensworth felt better," and then she glided from the room, not the movement of a muscle of her stern face as she noiselessly closed the door behind her.

A week had now passed since Daisy's return. She had, to a degree, almost forgotten the events of Christmas, in the contemplation of other duties. She had not mentioned to her husband the circumstance of his visit to Mr. McKan's cottage unknown to herself, as whenever she intended doing so, something came in the way and drove it from her mind.

and so week passed week and nothing particular occurred, until one day—it was the beginning of February—that Phoebe came to her mistress with a face white with fear. Dorothy had asked permission to go out for an hour or two. Bertram was engaged in a case at the Law Courts, and only she and Daisy were at home.

"Whatever is the matter?" asked Daisy.

"Oh, ma'am!" said the girl, "do come downstairs. I told you I would find it out, and I have. Oh! it is dreadful!"

"What do you mean?" said her mistress, now almost as white as she, as putting down Chip, who had curled himself round for a nap in her lap as she read, she rose to follow the girl.

"Why, the door 'm! I have opened it at last," said Phoebe, who now descended the stairs leading to the kitchen, when she explained to Daisy how, after weeks of fruitless attempts at discovery, she had at last accidentally pressed against a spring, which was so hidden as to baffle the efforts of any but those in the secret to open it.

"And where does it lead to?" asked Daisy, being unable even now to account for the girl's terror.

"Oh, ma'am! you won't be very frightened, will you?" said Phoebe, as she looked up at her mistress, half doubtful whether she should even now let her know the full extent of the mystery; but as Daisy, whose curiosity now excelled the fear she might otherwise have felt, almost commanded the girl to show her to where the mysterious door led, the latter obeyed.

"Mind 'm," said Phoebe, as holding Daisy's hand she led her down the ladder or steps reaching to the floor of damp and miserable room, through the boards of which the grass was growing. It was perfectly dark save for a ray of light which came from a small grating, whilst a wooden chair and table was the sole furniture. On the other side was a door from which a flight of steps led to what originally had been a garden, where nothing was to be seen now but a well, whose murky waters even in the dim light were visible to tell of what it had been in the olden times, but which had been converted into a cellar.

A slight moan caused Daisy to start with fear, as Phoebe, telling her not to be frightened, led her to where in a corner of the room, reclining on a bed of straw, was the wasted form of a man; and she could scarcely suppress a scream, as in the semi-darkness he appeared to her to rise from the same, but it was only the movement of a wearied limb, as with a low moan he turned. His beard had grown so as to fall over his emaciated chest; his nails like birds' claws clutched the straw on which he lay, whilst even by that dim light could not be mistaken the look of idiocy which shone in his sunken eyes, as he strove to use his tongue, which was apparently paralysed.

"Come away Phoebe," said Daisy, as after vainly endeavouring to gain some explanation from the wretched creature she determined to ascend, and be silent on the matter until her husband's return. The light from the kitchen enabled them to retrace their steps without difficulty; but as they reached the latter, a sudden gust of wind seemed to catch the door at the top, and they heard it close on them with a spring.

Oh! the agony of that moment. Shut out from the world, imprisoned, maybe, with a dying maniac, were the thoughts of the terrified girls as they heard the door close on them.

They dare not scream, it might arouse the latent strength of the wretched being so accustomed to the sound of voices, dead to all but an inborn sense of fear, which might urge him to exert his power in self-preservation.

Quietly, almost fainting with dread, they groped their way up the steps until reaching the door. Phoebe laboured it with her fists, until the sounds might have been heard in the street, but to which there was no response save the barking of Chip, whose welcome voice reassured them as to their safety.

Moments which appeared to them as hours passed by, as they breathed the air of that hateful dungeon, no sound audible but the moan of the idiot as he turned now and then uneasily on his bed of straw, and the more reassuring sniffing and scraping of the dog as he vainly endeavoured to rescue his mistress.

At last Phoebe could hear Dorothy's voice, which to her had never before sounded so sweet, as she began to scold Chip, who barked and scraped with renewed vigour, and as the girl's knock joining in made her conclude something unusual had occurred during her absence. She, after a moment's hesitation, unfastened the door.

"Phoebe, what in Heaven's name are you doing here?" she asked, as the girl, trembling with fear, stood before her.

Her face was livid with rage, and she would almost have dragged her from her imprisonment or consigned her to its misery for ever had not a glimpse of Daisy, who in a dead faint lay on the steps, arrested her attention.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "and the mistress too. What does it all mean?"

"What does it all mean, indeed?" said Phoebe, in a sneering tone. "As if you didn't know. It means your secret is discovered; that's what it means."

Dorothy was about to retaliate as she heard Bertram enter the house, when, telling the girl to fetch her master, she supported Daisy, who had not yet recovered consciousness.

The girl, whose curiosity was now aroused to the highest pitch, watched with surprise the change which came over Bertram as he bent over the inanimate form of his wife. His face had become ghastly pale, whilst he appeared to be almost as much in need of support as the girl whose fragile form he endeavoured to raise in his trembling arms, whilst Dorothy, in whispered tones, told him of what had happened.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONFESSION.

Poor Daisy. For weeks after the events of that day she lay on a bed of sickness, in which her life trembled in the balance. The horrors of that night ever seemed present to her imagination, and the idiot's moan appeared to ring in her ears as the fever gained possession of her brain, but youth at last carried the victory over death, and she was saved.

Bertram had rarely or ever left her bedside since that hour when he carried her from the kitchen. His tears would, as drops of blood, fall on the coverlid, as with his head buried there he would listen to the ravings of her disordered fancy; and then he would pray that her life might be spared, or his end with hers; but then another thought more terrible still would take possession of his brain. Should she recover, would she not flee from him? Would she not turn from him with dread and hate, such as his crime deserved? His crime, and yet, was it not forced on him, and had not the load of that six years' secret been sufficient to bear without further punishment?

But when the blue eyes opened again with the light of reason it was on Bertie that their glance first fell.

"Oh, darling, are you here?" It was all she could faintly articulate, but his presence seemed to comfort her.

He asked no more, as he pressed kiss after kiss on her pale, transparent cheek.

"Bertie, where have I been?" she again asked, as she looked into his eyes looking down so lovingly on her.

"You have been ill—very, very ill, Daisy; but you will soon be well now, and then I will take you where you can gather the primroses, and where the country air will bring back the roses to your cheek."

"Oh, yes!" she said, excitedly. "Away from here. Oh, say you will take me away from here!"

"I will, darling," he replied, "but you must be quiet; and here is Phoebe with some tea and toast, so I will leave you for a little

while," and whispering to the girl not to mention past occurrences in any way, he pressed a kiss on her lips and left the room.

"Mr. Ravensworth," it was Dorothy's voice calling him by name, as he descended from his wife's room, "are you going in there tonight?" and she pointed to the door of a room leading from the corridor on the firm landing.

"Yes; I had forgotten," he replied, as bidding the old housekeeper precede him, he entered the room indicated.

It was a comfortable apartment, to which the glow of a bright fire lent warmth and colour, although from the window, as with all others in that extraordinary structure, could be seen nothing but windows or chimney-pots in return.

A bed was placed against the further wall, opposite to the fireplace, and as Bertie gazed on the meaningless face of the occupant a revulsion of feelings passed through his mind, and, as a moan escaped from the man, he asked if he were in pain. The idiot drew his features into a hideous grimace, and Bertie turned from him.

"Is this the revenge that one says is so sweet?" he thought, and, as he stood looking long and deep into the burning coal, Dorothy seemed to read what was passing in his mind.

"I must speak to you, Mr. Ravensworth—little Bertie, as I used to call you when, as a baby, you clung to me, and I was not then the vile creature I am now; but if you kill me I must tell you. I can bear it no longer."

"I do not understand, Dorothy; what is it you mean? You have ever been true and faithful to me," said Bertram.

"No, no," said the old woman, as she raised her apron to wipe the tears which gathered in her eyes. "I loved you as though you were my own boy. I was jealous of any who came between us, and she did, and I hated her, and—"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Bertie. "What is it you would say? Go on—let me hear the worst!"

More than an hour elapsed before Bertram came from that room, but his face was stern and white as he descended to the sitting-room. The next morning Dorothy was gone.

"What can it all mean?" thought Phoebe, as she vainly searched every room in the hope of finding the housekeeper. "Do you know, sir, if Dorothy is gone out?" she asked of her master, who was standing in the hall as she descended.

"Dorothy has left my service," was the reply, "and I am now going to obtain some one to fill her place; but remember, Phoebe," and he looked into the girl's half-frightened face, "not a word of what has occurred in this house to the new comer. Will you swear now to mention it?"

"I will, sir, I will!" said Phoebe, as she endeavoured to free herself from the vice-like grip with which Bertram seized her wrist.

"And now go to your mistress. I shall not long," and, releasing her, he opened the door, hanging it after him.

For some time the girl stood where he had left her. She listened to his footsteps as he went down that long passage until she could hear them no longer, and then she ascended the stairs to her mistress's room, not sorry that Dorothy had at last got the sack, as she called it, which, in her opinion, she should have had long ago.

And as the warm spring sun found its way, notwithstanding bricks and mortar, into the room where Daisy lay, it brought renewed strength to her fragile form, left so weak from the fever which had taken such possession of her brain, as to enable her to look on real events merely as the fancies of her disordered imagination. The absence of Dorothy she did not appear to notice, or, if so, seemed almost thankful for the relief from her presence, whilst Phoebe as a sunbeam cast a brightness over the room from which she was seldom absent.

The woman whom Bertram had engaged to take the place of Dorothy was a good-natured, comely matron, with whom that young lady was on the best of terms; and it was with a great effort of self-control that the latter could refrain from entering into confidences; but each time she happened to meet her master one look from him was sufficient to put aside all other communicative wishes, and the new housekeeper never knew but that the poor idiot had always occupied the same room in which he then was.

"Poor fellow!" she said to Bertram one morning as she came from his room, "I think him very bad, and that you had better have a doctor to see him, sir, as it strikes me he will not be here long," and acting on her suggestion he entered to judge for himself as to the state of her patient.

True as the woman said, the life of the poor imbecile was fast ebbing away; the long confinement to which he had been subjected had done its work, and he was too far gone to derive temporary relief from the change to the better, when he was removed from the prison he so long occupied to the room in which he was now placed.

As Bertram advanced to the bed on which he lay, his hard breathing told but too plainly the end was near, as nothing but a long moan would escape his lips, until, in turning, his half-closed eyes rested on him, when again a hideous grimace distorted his dying features, over which a death film was already gathering.

A doctor was summoned, but his aid was no avail, as a few days after he breathed his last, in the presence of the man who had so cruelly injured him, whilst he was with folded arms, and bowed head, he looked on the victim of a bitter wrong. The past came before him so vividly, in all its horrors, that he could not restrain the curse he prayed might fall on the head of her who had by her falsehood brought such misery on them both; and as he buried his face in his hands, bitters tears of agony escaped through his fingers; but the remembrance of his wife, his beautiful Daisy, recalled him to himself, and making a strong effort to restrain his emotion he nervously unburdened his bosom of the secret which had made his existence a hell, and trust to her love not to thrust him from her. He could not bear that she should hear from other lips the story which had so embittered his youth, which had in after years been as a millstone around his neck, from which he could not free himself. No; he would place himself at her mercy and if she turned from him; it could not be worse than the living lie which as a worm gnawed at his heart's vitals. But no, she would not; his gentle love would not withhold the blessing of her forgiveness, which was all he craved for—her love to make him care to live, and by his future life atone for the past; and so, with one last look at the dead man's face, he hurried from the apartment.

He entered the room where Daisy, now sufficiently recovered, sat enjoying the warm, spring air which came in at the partially open window. A little canary was singing its sweetest, as it swelled its tiny throat in the pretty cage which was suspended from the ceiling, whilst Chip, who ever took up his position as bodyguard over his mistress, was reclining on the rug at her feet.

A faint tinge of colour suffused her face as Bertram entered, and a glad welcome shone from her blue eyes as she put up her mouth to receive the usual kiss.

"Oh, Bertie, I am getting so well," she said. "I think I shall be able to go to Sandfield next week, as mamma wishes me to; but what makes you look so grave, darling? Has anything happened?"

"No, Daisy. Nothing new," he replied; "but you cannot expect me to look very lively when my darling is ill, can you?" and he laid her head on his shoulder as he drew a chair close to where she sat.

"That will do, Phoebe," said Daisy to the girl, who busied herself arranging and re-

ranging the different articles scattered over the room. "You can go now, and when I want you I will call. I do so love to have you alone, Bertie, all alone," said Daisy, as Phoebe closed the door behind her, and she nestled closer to her husband's side.

"And supposing, Daisy," said Bertie, "some one should one day tell you that I was wicked, that I had committed some great crime, would you still cling to me, or would you hold aloof, even although a dreadful provocation drove me to commit an unpremeditated wrong? Would you—"

Daisy turned before he could complete the sentence, and drawing his face down to hers.

"Bertie," she said, "what is it? I would believe nothing said of you, nothing that you did not tell me yourself."

"And if I told you, Daisy?"

"If you told me anything ever so dreadful, Bertie, I should still love you. Nothing could alter that," she replied.

"Heaven bless you, my darling, my darling!" he said, as he smothered her face with kisses, and holding her in his arms so that the sunlight might fall on her golden tresses, he told her the story of the past.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOROTHY'S REVENGE.

"As you know, Dorothy had been an old servant in my father's house, having nursed my mother in her infancy as she did me. She was devotedly attached to the family, so much so as to be jealous to a fearful extent of anything or anyone in whom we took an interest, and whom she would ever avow were after us for no good. She idolized my mother, she worshipped me, and when I first left home, wept over me as though I had been her own child.

"A year or two after my father died, and my mother's health being much impaired the cares of the household devolved on Dorothy, who, before and after the death of the latter, was virtually mistress of this old house.

"In the course of events, I became engaged to be married to Frederica Smallwood. She was an orphan, and at the time we met was governess in a gentleman's family where I was staying as a guest.

"On my return home, when I told Dorothy of my intended marriage, she congratulated me on the same, hoping I should be happy, but at the same time, I thought her manner constrained, until I assured her her services as housekeeper would still be retained, when she appeared to take a great interest in my affairs.

"A few months passed, and I brought my bride home, but Frederica was of a proud and impetuous nature, and I could soon see she would not brook the interference of anyone in her household arrangements, over which she, and she only, determined to be mistress. This led to stormy scenes between her and the old housekeeper, and did not add to the comfort of my home; for much as I wished to gratify the desire of my wife I could not make up my mind to dismiss the old woman, who had become as much a portion of the house as the walls themselves. However, at this time I had occasion to leave town, and kissing my wife told her on my return I would make fresh arrangements, and she should select such servants as she wished. During my absence I wrote almost daily to Frederica, but with the exception of two letters, in the last of which she told me that her cousin, Hugh Clifford, was in town, and had been to see her, I heard no further. I knew Hugh, who I thought was a frank, open-hearted fellow, and was almost glad that Freddie had some companion during my absence; but as day after day passed, and I received no letter in reply to mine, I became anxious, and wrote to Dorothy, asking if her mistress was ill.

"The answer I received for the moment almost drove me mad, and as Dorothy wrote me that if I returned unexpected on the following evening I should be convinced of the truth

of her statement. I threw up the business on which I was engaged and hurried home. It was about eight in the evening that I arrived here, and without exchanging a word with Dorothy, who opened the door, I threw off my overcoat and rushed into the room. There sat my wife and Hugh; they seemed startled at my presence, and the former turned pale, as I thought, with detected guilt, whilst her companion, holding out his hand, advanced to where I stood. I was mad with rage at what I considered was his consummate impudence, and with one blow felled him to the ground, his head coming with force on the iron of the fender.

"'Oh! what have you done, what have you done?' cried Frederica, as she threw herself on the breast of the prostrate man, and in my blind fury I heeded not her cries, alone upbraiding her with her faithlessness. To her denial I paid no attention, nor did I need the continued unconsciousness of my supposed rival, until Dorothy, who now presented herself on the scene, whispered that he was dead, and, leading her mistress from the room, left me alone with my inanimate foe."

He felt a shudder pass through the frame of the girl he held in his arms, as she almost shrank from his embrace.

"Daisy," he said, as a look of agony passed over his face. "Do not shrink from me, dearest; I was, indeed, more sinned against than sinning, although, Frederica, my poor wife, was innocent of the charge imputed to her."

"And you loved her, Bertie?" asked Daisy.

"No, darling," he replied; "as I told you, her hot, passionate temper was a constant source of annoyance; we two soon discovered we were not suitable to each other."

"And what of Hugh?" said Daisy; "was he really dead?"

"As Freddie left the room, I began to realize the position in which I stood. I knelt beside him, endeavouring by every means in my power to restore animation, but without effect, until, fully believing that life was extinct, a horrible resolve took possession of my mind, and I determined to hide every trace of my crime by disposing of the body. For this purpose I lifted the lifeless form in my arms (he was but a slight youth), and descended to the cellar, intending to bury all traces of my crime in the murky waters of the well that I knew was there; but just as I reached the last step a faint sigh from my burden assured me that he still lived, and, gently laying him down on the damp floor I hastily fetched light and restoratives, and, thank Heaven, I found it to be true; he still breathed, and I was about to bring him again to the room above, when Dorothy stood before me, pouring into my ears, as I thought, fresh proof of my wife's infidelity, until I determined to leave him, and thus consign the life I could not take to wear itself out in lonely misery.

"That night a son was born to me, and a few days later I was a widower. The child I never saw, I ever refused to see, and what became of it I never knew, nor cared to know."

"And was Hugh the idiot I found in the room below?" asked Daisy. "Oh, Bertie, this is terrible!"

"Hear me to the end, darling," he said. "I was not the fiend for which you take me. My anger passed with my wife's death, and I determined at all risks to release Hugh, although I knew he would, on regaining his liberty, immediately bring an action against me, if he did not give me in charge for attempted murder; but when I entered his prison for that purpose I found him, as you saw him, a hopeless idiot, steadily refusing to leave the room I had assigned him. I knew I could fully depend on Dorothy to attend to his requirements, and keep the secret of his hiding-place, little knowing then, as I do now, that it was her wickedness that had worked such fearful misery to all."

"What, by telling you, do you mean?" asked Daisy.

"No," Bertram replied. "If she had only

told the truth, which until a few nights ago I believed she had done, I should have been spared the years of mental pain through which I have lived. That dreadful secret, the burden of which, when I knew and loved you, darling, became far heavier to bear; would never have been as a worm gnawing at my very life, and making me wretched in my happiness."

"But what of Dorothy?" asked Daisy. "I have not seen her for a long time. Is she still here?"

"No, darling; the night she confessed to me her perfidy she left this roof which could shelter her no longer. When she told me that she had interrupted letters between Frederic and myself, that he had, through jealousy and hate of my wife, she had told me tales which made me burn with fury against her who was innocent of all; I could bear her presence no longer. It was she who took from me my boy, and left him for strangers to find and tend, and made my life, until I saw you, dearest, a void."

"And the child, Bertie, did you never hear what became of him?"

"Yes, Daisy; the child left on the Sandfield platform, the boy you loved, the little Guy who I never saw, until death claimed him for his own, was my son."

"Oh! Bertie, are you sure?" asked Daisy, excitedly. "What proof had you that he was your boy?"

"This, dearest," answered her husband, "as also the confession of Dorothy," and he took from his breast-pocket the old paper which was found in the hamper which contained the infant on that night when Tom took the babe to his home. "Look here," he said; "the monogram is my wife's, the writing is that of Dorothy. I did not know till she told me of her crime that she was a native of Sandfield; but so strange is truth that the first time my eyes fell on the boy my heart seemed to warm towards him; but not until the last time I saw him at the porterior cottage, with Dorothy's message of flowers, in the cross which bore his initials G. R.—Guy Ravensworth—did I feel what she has confessed, the fact that I gazed on my dead son."

"Oh, Guy, poor little Guy!" sobbed Daisy, "how I wish that he had lived."

"It is better not, darling," he replied, as he drew her closer to his breast, and after a moment's pause, "Daisy, my love, my life, can you forgive me?"

"Yes, Bertie, I love you too much for even the shadow of the past to come between us," she answered.

"Heaven bless you! Heaven bless you!" he said, as tears he could not restrain fell on her golden-head. "Then I will take you from this hateful place. We will have a pretty home in one of the suburbs, where my darling can hear the songs of birds, and, instead of these old bricks, she shall see the varied hues of flowers, and, in them and my love, forget the past."

"But Hugh?" asked Daisy, as the remembrance of the idiot crossed her brain.

"He is at rest, dearest," was her husband's reply, and she knew, as he pointed upwards that Hugh Clifford's life had passed away.

"There is but one, Bertie, for whom I would plead, notwithstanding her greatness. Dorothy, poor Dorothy, great as was her crime, it was through her jealous love for you that she became so wicked. She is very, very old, and her days here cannot be many. Let her end them under our roof, where, in repentance for the past, she can prepare to meet the God who would not refuse forgiveness to greater sinners than her."

A kiss was all the answer Daisy received, as, shaking with the emotion he could ill restrain, he pressed her to his bosom, and Dorothy's pardon was in her hands.

CHAPTER IX., AND LAST.

FIVE YEARS AGO.

It was the middle of June, one of those days when one appears almost to drink the air which has such an exhilarating effect on the

human spirits. Save for a fleecy cloud which would occasionally arise, the heavens were one transcendent blue, the rays of the afternoon sun, shing on the bright green grass, and playing on the waters of a tiny fountain, which threw up its sprays, to descend as spun glass in the sunlight, the flowers beneath greedily drinking in the drops as they fell.

The air was alive with the hum of insects, and on the branches of the trees birds were singing to the glory of their Creator, whilst the merry laughter of children resounded in the walks, as their little feet trod down the new gravel.

"Oh, mamma, I'm so afraid," said a little girl of three years, as she rushed into the arms of a lady who was engaged on some needlework beneath the branches of a shady tree, whilst an aged woman sat by her side, with an infant in her lap. "Oh, mamma, I'm so afraid," and she uttered a piercing scream as a boy two years her senior approached.

"What have you there, Guy?" asked his mother, as that young gentleman placed his hands suspiciously behind him.

"Oh, only a toad, mamma dear," said the boy, as bringing his arms forward he showed her the treasure he had found, as his sister, with another scream, hid her face in her mother's lap. "But Daisy is so silly, she's frightened at anything."

"Take it away, sir," said his mother, sharply, as, saying he was going to "bust" it, the boy turned away with the unfortunate toad which he placed in the basin of the neighbouring fountain, but as the glass door leading from the drawing-room to the garden was heard to open the poor thing was left to the merciless water, and Guy ran to jump into his father's arms, as he flung his own with the sleeves, wet to his elbows, around his neck.

"You young scamp, what have you been up to?" said Bertie, as he freed himself from the boy's wet embrace, and advancing to where his wife sat with the little Daisy in her lap, he bent down to imprint a kiss upon her brow.

"Who do you think has come to take you away before the hay is all gathered?" he said, as he told his wife to come into the house, where sat Mr. and Mrs. Mortram awaiting her.

"Oh, father, mother," she said, as she threw herself into their arms. "When did you come to London, and why did you not write to tell us of your intended visit?" whilst Guy climbed up his grandfather's legs, leaving his little sister to peep shyly from behind Daisy's dress.

"Don't be so tiresome, you naughty boy," said the latter to her firstborn, as putting him on one side, she beckoned to Dorothy to bring baby for the inspection of the visitors; and when, a few days later, Daisy and her husband accepted the invitation of the old people, he was not excepted from the family party, and there, amidst her own green fields, and acres of golden corn, we will leave them in their happiness.

[THE END.]

FACETIAE.

It was not unnatural for a poor, one-legged beggar to ask to be re-membered.

"MAMMA," said a little fellow whose mother had forbidden him to draw horses and ships on the mahogany sideboard with a sharp nail—"mamma, this ain't a nice house. At Sam Rackett's we can cut the sofa, pull out the hair, and ride the shovel and tongs over the carpet; but here we can't get any fun at all."

A very homely man, finding his little nephew crying one day, said to him: "Johnny, you shouldn't cry. It will make you look ugly as you grow older." The little fellow gazed earnestly at the speaker for a while, and then solemnly said, "Uncle, you must have cried a great deal when you were a little boy."

"DRUNKENNESS is now on the increase in Paris," said a temperance man to a statistician. "That will have a tendency to injure the young there." "How so?" "Because in Paris there is only one lamp-post to every fifty inhabitants."

Owls are easily tamed, and sometimes make interesting pets. They can learn some simple tricks, like eating out of one's hand, seizing the end of a rope in one's hand, and letting me swing them around in a circle, coming at the sound of their name, climbing the balustrade in your hall, or jumping through a hoop. The solemn air they carry all the while makes them amusing.

X., a distinguished literary man, has just started a new review, which has not yet attained a very large subscription list. Only, instead of putting his name on the title-page, he has used a pseudonym. He met his friend G. yesterday, and asked him with a careless air if he had read the last number of the review. "Certainly; I am a subscriber." "Ah, it's you!"

"WHAT, another cup of tea, Mr. Dunley?" exclaimed the landlady, as he passed his cap for the third time. "I am delighted to see the you are enjoying your supper." "Yes," responded Dunley. "I was quite hungry to-night, and the tea tastes unusually good." "Not very complimentary to me," went on the landlady, with a sort of second class, gentle little laugh. "I generally make the tea myself, but to-night I was busy about something else, and the cook made it. I wonder what she could have put in it." "Well," responded Dunley, as he stirred it gently with his spoon, "I should judge from the taste that she must have put some tea in it."

RIPE FRUIT.

The world generally git things about level; they hav allowed a fu deserving ones to go unrewarded, but i never kan them to let a del beat git the start ov them, for enny grage length ov time.

Det is a kind ov slo pizan.

One hit to five misses is about the fair average ov life; and the world keeps its stern reckol ov the misses, and leaves the hits to blo their own horn.

Truth is a simple thing, but it rules the universe, and fashions the destiny ov man.

Luv-will substis on koarse phood, but friendship must hav daintys.

One ov the happiest things kind Hawn ever has done for the krow, is to make each krow certain that her little krow is the blackest.

A mizer is allwuss extolling his own liberality, and komplaining ov the avarice ov his usbers.

The grage power of welsh is, it enables man to be generous; its greatest blessing, when it prompts him to be so.

The science and philosophy ov all things is nothing more than the common sense that is in it.

My dear phellow, if yn expekt to sit on the top round ov the ladder, yn hav got to klim: not one in four millynuns has ever got thata wings.

The best way iz to take things az we find them. Yu kan't argy the krooks out ov a fox's tale; you may knt it oph, and then, don't ye see! you hain't got enny tale.

If you would edukate the world, yn must learn the art ov teaching them without showin yore hand.

When we are yung we are all, phell, hurrah and no experience, and when we git old we have a little experience and no hurrah at all.

"The world never was so korrupt az it is now." This has been the opinion ov the burkokers we hav had enny time for the last four thousand years.

Man sallid grow more virtuous as they gro older. They sometimes tire out their vots —Josh Billings.

SOCIETY.

The Queen recently presented enamelled portraits of the late Duke of Albany to Lieutenant Munro, Sergeant Tonner, and the men of the Seaforth Highlanders, who carried the coffin on the day of the funeral of the late Prince Leopold. Her Majesty also presented Lieutenant Seymour Munro with a memorial pin and a photograph of his late Royal Highness.

The Queen visited the remains of the late Duke of Albany, which are entombed in the Royal vault beneath the Albert Memorial Chapel, Windsor Castle, on the 21st May. Her Majesty, accompanied by Princess Beatrice, both attired in the deepest mourning, drove from the palace, about five o'clock, to the Deanery on the Castle Hill, where the Royal party were received by the Very Rev. Randall T. Davidson, and conducted through the study of the residence to the Albert Memorial Chapel to the east aisle of St. George's Chapel, where Mr. Howe, the clerk of the works, was in attendance. The Queen and Princess descended to the vault, which had been prepared for the visit, during which it is believed some choice flowers were placed upon the coffin containing the remains of the late Prince. The Royal party subsequently walked back to the Deanery, which they left about half-past five o'clock. The remains were also visited by the Duke of Edinburgh and the Grand Duke Paul of Russia, and later on by the Marchioness of Ely and Duchess of Athole.

The Prince of Wales is staying now at the Grand Hotel at Royat in Auvergne for his health. His Royal Highness occupies a splendid apartment in the Hotel, from the windows of which he has a panoramic view of Auvergne scenery. The military authorities have placed a regimental band at his disposal, which plays every day under his windows. His Royal Highness closely follows the course of treatment prescribed for him by his medical advisers. The arrival of the Prince of Wales has caused quite a stir at Royat, and indeed, throughout the principal towns of Auvergne, many of the most distinguished among the gentry of the neighbourhood expecting a visit from him during his sojourn of a few weeks among them.

The 5th Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry has been presented with new colours at Bodmin by Lady Elizabeth St. Aubyn, the service being performed by the Bishop of Truro. The Earl of Mount-Edgecombe, Lord-Lieutenant of the county, and formerly captain in the regiment, also took part in the ceremony, and the company present included Sir John St. Aubyn, Bart., M.P., and Admiral Sir Houston Stewart, Commander-in-Chief at Devonport. A distinguished party were afterwards entertained at luncheon by Colonel St. Aubyn and the officers of the battalion.

The first meet of the Four-in-Hand Club at the Magazine was held on May 21st, and was a great success, though several notable teams were absent, including those of the Prince of Wales—who owns two drags—the Duke of Beaufort, Lord Lonsdale, Major Whitmore, Sir Thomas Peyton, Mr. Long, and Colonel Ewart. Among the friends of coaches who took seats on their drags were Lord and Lady March, the Marquis of Stafford, the Baroness Bolsover, Lady Castlereagh, Lady Hothfield, Lady Claud Hamilton, Madame de Poutales, and Mr. Christopher Sykes. Excepting Lord Shrewsbury's drag, which came to a halt before going half way round, all the coaches drove by way of Hyde Park-corner and Knightsbridge to the end of the Park, whence some of them went on to Hurlingham, through the plurality returned to the Park, which was incomparably more crowded than on any previous day this season. One of the most noticeable features of the meet was the prevalence of "blacks" among the teams which a few years ago were detested. Perhaps it was in memory of the Duke of Albany.

STATISTICS.

SEVEN hundred and twenty-five lives were saved last year by the lifeboats of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, which further rescued 230 persons by means of shore-boats, &c. Thirty vessels were also saved by the aid of the institution, which now owns 274 life-boats on the British coasts. Numerous rewards for bravery were granted in the year, and the Committees distributed £5,897 in relief to widows and orphans, injured sailors, &c.

THE COST OF ARMY HEAD DRESS.—The head-dress of the Highlanders costs £2 9s. 3d., and its accompaniment 4s. 3d., and lasts eight years, at an annual cost of 8s. 3d. The bearskin of the Foot Guards costs £1 9s., lasts six years, at an annual cost of 1s. 10d.; and the bearskin of the 2nd Dragoons, with the hackle feather, costs £3 1s. 3d., lasts six years, at an annual cost of 1s. 9d. The brass helmet costs from 17s. 9d. to 21 10s. 2d., and lasts six or eight years, at an annual cost of less than 4s. The cheapest head-dress is the cloth helmet of the Engineers and Artillery, which costs 6s. and lasts four years, at an annual cost of 1s. 6d.

GEMS.

THE clever turn everything to account. Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us, or we find it not.

WHEN a misfortune happens to a friend, look forward and endeavour to prevent the same thing from happening to yo self.

No life can be well ended that has not been well spent; and what life has been well spent that has had no purpose, that has accomplished no object, that has realized no hopes?

THERE is nothing more sure, we take it, than that those who are the most alert in discovering the faults of a work of genius are the least touched with its beauties.

THERE are a great many duties that cannot wait. Unless they are done the moment they present themselves, it is not worth while to do them at all.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

STEWED POTATOES—Rub a saucepan with a clove of garlic, put two ounces of butter into it, and when it is melted add six new potatoes peeled, and cut in quarters. Put in a little hot water, pepper, and salt to taste, a small quantity of grated nutmeg, some minced parsley, and the juice of half a lemon. Let the whole stew slowly till the potatoes are quite done.

CUTLETS OF CALVES' BRAINS.—Lay the brains in cold water to whiten. Put them in a stewpan with a little water, a tablespoonful of vinegar, an onion, two or three cloves, a little white wine, salt, and white pepper. Simmer the brains half-an-hour, then lay them on a sieve to drain. When cold cut them in slices, and dip them either in butter or egg and bread-crums seasoned with salt and white pepper; fry them in butter. Serve as a side dish or accompaniment to any delicate vegetable.

CHESSE OMELET.—Beat up three eggs, with pepper and salt to taste, and two tablespoonfuls of grated Parmesan cheese. Put a piece of butter the size of an egg into the omelet-pan; as soon as it is melted, pour in the eggs, holding the handle of the pan with one hand, stir the omelet with the other by means of a flat spoon. The moment the omelet begins to set, cease stirring, but keep shaking the pan for a minute or so; then with the spoon double up the omelet, and keep on shaking the pan until the under side is of good colour. Turn it out on a hot dish, coloured side uppermost, and serve quickly, with Parmesan cheese sprinkled all over it.

MISCELLANEOUS.

EVERY human being has a work to carry on within, duties to perform abroad, influences to exert, which are peculiarly his, and which no conscience but his own can teach.

CENSURE AND CRITICISM never hurt anybody. If false they cannot harm you, unless you are wanting in character; and, if true, they show a man his weak points, and forewarn him against failure and trouble.

VIRTUE consists in making desire subordinate to duty, passion to principle. The pillars of character are moderation, temperance, chastity, simplicity, self-control; its method is self-denial.

PAPER TOWELS.—In the surgical dispensary of the Philadelphia Polyclinic, Dr. Robertis has, we read in the *Medical and Surgical Reporter* of that city, been using with much satisfaction Japanese paper handkerchiefs for drying wounds. Sponges are so seldom and with such difficulty perfectly cleansed after being once used, that they are never employed in the hospital. Ordinary cotton or linen towels are much preferable to sponges, which, if dirty, are liable to introduce septic materials into wounds. The paper towels, however, answer the same purpose as cotton ones, and are so cheap that they can be thrown away after being used. The cost of washing a large number of ordinary towels is thus avoided. The paper towels are scarcely suitable for drying hands, after washing, unless several towels be used at once, because a large amount of moisture on the hands soon saturates a single towel. For removing blood from wounds a paper towel is crumpled up into a sort of ball, and then used as a sponge. Such balls absorb blood rapidly. The crude ornamental pictures, in colour, on the towels, are of no advantage, nor are they, as far as known, any objection.

TRIMMING HER OWN BONNET.

IT is a pleasant thing to sit by the evening lamp and watch a lady trimming her bonnet. Many ladies, even of those who are accustomed to pay without murmuring their guinea or two, or five or ten to the milliner for a ready-made structure, cannot really afford the expense. Suppose they can afford it, is not the trimming of a hat the prettiest and daintiest piece of fancy-work imaginable?

Would not ladies do well to lay aside their "embroidery," which in most cases is the mere stitching of a stamped pattern of some other person's designing, and devote a little of their leisure to this elegant and useful task, in which they will find an unbounded field for the display, not only of manual skill, but of individual taste and judgment?

We may be a little prejudiced by the pleasure it gives to see a lady thus occupied. It is so agreeable a process to watch—to see the care with which she balances on her hand the delicate, undecorated straw object, inspecting, with head poised sideways, and serious eye, each bend and quirk of its elaborate shape. To note how she pins a feather upon one side, and then darts to the glass to see its effect; how, returning, she quickly but gently whisk it off again to try it somewhere else; and, indeed, in a dozen positions, before she fits upon the right one; and to hear her sigh of satisfaction when it is at length placed.

With each plume, bow, or buckle, the same process is repeated, enlivened by occasional little outbursts of despair or delight. If at a critical point the observer ventures to offer encouragement, no reply is vouchsafed save a quelling "Sh-h!" or perhaps, if the fair worker's mouth is full of pins, merely a gesture of impatience. Comment is not desired until the great labour is finished. Then approbation will be welcome, and the difficulties attending each special triumph of arrangement will be explained, as the radiant owner stands with the completed wonder upon her head, turning from the mirror to her critic and back again, to discover and point out new beauties.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. H. D.—It is a trade secret.

GERTY.—1. Nothing but re-dyeing it. 2. Yes, and it is very advisable. 3. Fair.

C. R.—Athletic sports are the best. You are quite of the average height.

COLLEEN BAWN ASTHORPE.—1 and 2. See answer to COLLEEN BAWN. 3. The ring should be given back when the engagement is broken off.

ST. BLAISE.—Rub the skin well after washing with a coarse towel, and apply a little powdered Fuller's earth.

NELLIE PIPER.—Professional artiste engaged for the purpose. Some members of the family we believe are very clever modellers.

LILLIAN.—A young lady is of age and her own mistress at twenty-one, and a young gentleman the same.

MAUD.—Your hair is bright brown; May's very dark brown. Grey eyes and a clear complexion would suit both styles.

WINIFRED.—1. By no means. 2. Keep it cut short. 3. Rather young. 4. Fair writing. 5. It is a proof of taste. Personally we should prefer the latter.

ROSAMOND.—1. The distance from London to Liverpool by rail is 20½ miles. 2. Bertha means "bright" or "famous;" Minnie, "small;" Kate, "pure." Handwriting fair, but careless. Eat plenty of fresh vegetables, and take exercise in the open air.

IGNORAMUS.—1. It is purely a matter of taste, but everything should be cold. 2. Yes, the bride cuts the cake, which is placed opposite to her, and she cuts the first piece, generally a small wedge-like portion. It may then be served in the usual style by the chief bridesmaid.

MINTIE M.—1. Nothing. 2. Several things, but all injurious to health, so we decline to give them. 3. Say you are very much obliged to her and return it. 4. It depends on whether you are engaged, and also how long you have been so.

BLACK BISS.—Ribbons can be cleaned by careful washing in a lather with nearly cold water, and afterwards carefully rinsing and drying. 2. It depends on the terms on which they are. The lady's mother would be her best guide. Writing fair, but too small to be fashionable.

K. M. C.—To make ice cream take of any preserved fruit ten pounds; cream, two gallons; juice of ten lemons, with enough sugar to sweeten to taste. Pass through a sieve, put in the freezing pot, and work till ready for use.

T. B.—The gentleman should give you time to grow more certain of your feelings for him. You are too young to marry anyone. It would be better for you to seek employment in the care of children, sewing, or any light family housework for a couple of years, at least.

W. A. G.—Decidedly not! The leap-year privilege is merely fanciful. No lady ever proposed without loss of dignity and modesty. If your beau is dilatory about proposing, we advise you to invite other company, and thus show him that he may lose you by neglecting to speak out.

L. O. D.—First make sure of the condition of your own heart. Many girls, after becoming engaged, pass through such a period of doubt. You may be altogether mistaken. If you do not love your betrothed, you had better disclose the fact to him.

TRWY.—We would not advise you to continue the acquaintance of any young man who is guilty of rudeness and any ungentlemanly behaviour. It might be well for the present to act with some reserve, but not to drop the young man altogether.

CARRIE F.—You had better talk the matter over with the young lady and her parents. If you cannot afford to marry, it would be very much better to postpone the wedding. You are too young to take such a responsibility upon your shoulders.

JENNY.—1. Tied with green nut brown, tied with pink fawn. Bed with dark red golden auburn, tied with light green golden. The last two are very similar. 2. We are not acquainted with the poem "Curfew must not ring to-night."

CARRIE.—The "Tortoise" is the name of a child's hat which promises to become all the rage. In shape it resembles the turtle, the ridges in the top of the hat being similar to those found on a turtle shell, but here, however, the resemblance ceases. It is a jaunty, drowsy little hat, with the crown and brim in one, and a band underneath to hold it on the head. It is very pretty in fine white Milan, with platted Oriental lace underneath the brim, and a ruching of the same around the inside band. Upon one side of the front is an immense bow of coquille red velvet ribbon, with a cluster of natural-looking water-lilies in the centre. Two diamond-shaped pieces of velvet ribbon are let through the left side of the brim, and adorned with gilt crescents. A cluster of three coquille red tips are fastened just beneath the brim in front, two turning up and one drooping down over the hair. Long loops of ends of velvet ribbons, coming from underneath the brim, form streamers behind.

F. F. V.—We do not encourage flirtation in any form.

H. C. LEE.—Glycerine or olive oil might help you.

H. B.—"A proposal" is declined with thanks.

COWSLIP MEAD.—Hair light brown almost flaxen.

Writing fair. Florence means a "flower."

G. N. D.—Ordinary paint, thoroughly dried and well varnished afterwards.

DERMOT DUNNE.—The handwriting is quite good enough for the purpose named.

M. T. G.—Apply to the secretary at the chief office of the particular company you wish to be employed by. The addresses are given in the Post Office Directory.

COLLEEN BAWN.—1. In three years' time will be quite soon enough. 2. We should hope not. 3. Fair, but spelling may be improved.

R. H.—1. Any pretty gem ring will serve for an engagement ring. 2. Any good bookseller will procure one for you.

ALLAN.—If the creditor named had due notice of the meetings, and you have obtained your discharge, he cannot recover. He should have proved his debt.

VIOLET E. T.—1. Decidedly injurious. 2. Press them out with a watch key, and then bathe with dilute spirits of wine. 3. Send the photo with a stamped and addressed envelope. The photo will be returned immediately, and a notice appear as soon as possible.

REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING.

I often think, when comes

The bair my weather,

And blossoms wake

Along the great highway—

When sweet birds sing

Their love-songs all together,

And build their nests

On many a budding spray—

What of the past, the frosty, cold December,

Shall I forget, and what shall I remember?

Let me forget the cares,

The pains and sorrows,

If these have made me

Patient hour by hour—

The dreary days that brought

Such bright to-morrows—

The blighting frost that :

Did not kill the flower!

Let me forget the sighing and the weeping

Who have been spared to see the glorious reaping.

Let me forget false friends

And fickle neighbours,

Who seemed so fair in

Fortune's day of joy :

With little souls who

Glory in their labours,

If they can peace

And character desroy:

All evil things, that make life's bleak December,

And then, ah! then, pray what shall I remember?

Let me remember those

Who have stood by me

When clouds hung low;

Clouds, big with bitter rain—

The common blessings

Oft withheld to try me—

The ripened fruit that

Careful sower gain.

Let me remember mercy's shining arrow,

And that God even heeds the falling sparrow.

M. A. K.

LIZZIE W. W.—Do not make yourself too cheap. Let the sulky fellow alone for a week or so, and if he really cares for you he will soon come round; if not, you are well rid of him, for he would only ill you sooner or later. We assume of course that you have given him no good cause for staying away. If it is on account of your friends disliking him, he ought to have had the manliness to tell you so. Perhaps it is only a lovers' quarrel, and will have blown over by the time you read these lines.

"QUEER FELLER."—1. To make good blacking (liquid) mix a quarter of a pound of ivory black with a table-spoonful of sweet oil; dissolve one pennyworth of copa-ras and three table-spoonfuls of treacle in a quart of vinegar; then add one pennyworth of vitriol, and mix all well together. 2. If the skin is not broken paint the joint with tincture of iodine, and wear easy shoes. The soft skin should not be meddled with. If the pain does not yield to the above simple treatment consult a surgeon. 3. Fair, but might be neater. 4. George means "a tiller of the soil."

CARRIE L.—1. Live sparingly and simply, take plenty of exercise, and your pimples (unless caused by some skin disease, in which case you should consult an experienced medical man) will soon disappear. For brownness of the neck, if caused by sunburn, keep it covered, and apply the following lotion: Borax, two drachmas; Roman alum, one drachm; camphor, one drachm; sugar candy, half an ounce; ox-gall, one pound. Mix and stir well together for ten minutes, repeat the stirring three or four times a day for a fortnight till it appears clear and transparent. Strain through blotting paper, and bottle up for use. 2. Handwriting very good.

J. T.—Decidedly, if he can afford it.

EDWIN R.—The 19th May, 1859, fell on a Thursday.

PRINCESS IDA.—Not at all injurious.

NELLIE.—Either would be a very suitable present.

GEORGE L.—We do not know the firm.

J. K.—A pretty and engaging-looking girl, who should be good-tempered from her likeness.

T. M.—The lady should always have the wall or inside.

J. M. S.—The "friendly letter" is interesting, no doubt, but not suited to these columns.

JACK.—A good curling fluid is composed of borax dissolved in water.

F. C.—1. Yes. 2. Repeat it to yourself over and over again.

MAUD AND ROSE.—As repeatedly stated, we never insert matrimonial correspondence.

LEONARD.—The work named is published at half-a-crown, and is a very good book on the subject.

P. F. S.—Give up all thoughts of him. A man who could even suggest such a thing is not at all a desirable acquaintance.

W. V. S.—Eggs may be preserved by letting them boil for one minute, when they will keep for a month, or steep them in sweet oil for a short time.

COWSLIP.—1. As near black as possible. 2. Perhaps a trifle lighter. 3. Bright auburn. The hair would match with the ladies described.

G. R.—In strict etiquette you should have raised your hat, but it was in your case a pardonable omission.

ALLIE DOOK.—1. Quite proper if the lady does not object. 2. It depends upon the nature of the individual. 3. Quite young enough. 4. Writing good, but rather untidy.

"THE WEE DARLING OF SCOTLAND."—1. Tied with red, dark brown; tied with violet, bright brown. 2. October 29th, 1864, fell on a Saturday; December 31st, 1866, on a Friday, and April 10th, 1869, on a Saturday.

GUILLIAN.—1. Prince Edward of Saxe-Weimar is a general in the English army. He is a son of the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar. 2. The lines were written by Sir Walter Scott.

NEMO.—Very likely the young lady is in love with A, but he can hardly expect her to do the lovelmaking. Women like a bold wooer. Let him make the present, by all means, and take her out with him as much as he can.

FLORENCE C. P.—1. "Happy is the wooling that is not long-a-doing" is a good maxim, but under the circumstances you might wait a little longer supposing you love one another, but it is time the happy day was fixed. 2. Handwriting quite good enough for the purpose named. Hair pretty fawn colour.

W. A. S.—It would be very foolish to make any such inquiry. When you propose you will find out definitely how you are regarded. If you possess ordinary penetration you can judge pretty correctly of the lady's opinion of you. If any serious doubt exists in your mind of the lady's favour, you may be pretty sure that the doubt is well founded.

R. V. S. T.—Many wait for a little pressing. Yet there is nothing wrong in your reply, provided the manner is gracious. In the second case it is fitting to say, "you are very kind; the visit has been a pleasure to me," or something to that effect. It is usual for a man to present his wife to any one whom he himself recognizes, and of course to any relative. A good husband usually feels honest pride and therefore pleasure in doing this. Finally, formal thanks are not required, though often given by a certain class, but a kindly recognition of attention, in an informal way, is not out of place. Much depends on tone and manner.

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